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A BLIND man and a tortured man in the kraals of the Matabele have no hope of escaping death except through their own resources of endurance and courage. "SLAMASHLA MANI," a complete novelette, by Ferdinand Berthoud, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure
Feb. 20th 1922
Vol. XXXIII-No. 2

The Seventeen Thieves of El-Kalil

A Complete Novel

by TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "Guns of the Gods," "Under the Dome of the Rock," etc.

CHAPTER I

"Get the vote an' everything."

STEAM never killed Romance. It stalks abroad under the self-same stars that winked at Sinbad and Aladdin, and the only thing that makes men blind to it is the stupid craze for sitting in judgment on other people instead of having a good time with them.

"He who hates a thief is a thief at heart," runs the eastern proverb that nevertheless includes in its broad wisdom no brief at all for dishonesty.

If you hated thieves in El-Kalil you would be busy and, like the toad under the harrow, inclined to wonder where the gaps are; you can see the graves of the men who have tried it, in any direction, from any hill-top; and Romance, which knows nothing of any moral issue comes at last with the liquid moonlight making even whited tombs look sociable. But it is better to be sociable while you live, if only for the sake of having some good yarns to tell the other fellows during pauses in between the rounds of feasting in Valhalla, when you get there.

El-Kalil is Hebron of Old Testament fame—the oldest known city in the world, apart and aloof in the Judean Hills—dirty, delightful and without one trace of respect for anything but tradition, courage and cash.

Yet it was contrary to all tradition that an American citizen should be on his way there with almost unlimited authority to up-end everything, and, after spilling all the beans, to sort out the speckled undesirables. We ran into lots of courage, but it was fear of an uprising and its consequences that set the ball rolling. And as for hard cash, it was lack of it that brought the courage out, providing only two young men and some cigarets wherewith to hold calm and lawful the most turbulently lawless city in the Near East.

Grim took me along for several reasons, but the chief one was that he chose so to do.

Having been commissioned in the British army as an American, he had stuck to more than one national peculiarity, of which the first and the sweetest was doing as he gosh-darn pleased as long as he could get away with it. Having made good all along the line, he could get away with almost anything; and by that time, having risked a neck or two together, we were friends.

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The second most important reason, I believe, was that he, and the few in authority over him, had discovered that I had no ax to grind. Life isn't worth while to me if I've got to worry over other people's morals or be a propagandist; to my way of looking at it, a man has a hard enough job to keep his own conscience from getting indigestion, while getting all the fun in sight, and there's no fun whatever in forcing your opinions on other folk. And the other fellow's job is difficult enough without our offering ignorant advice. Life's a great game and the measure of our own cussedness is the measure with which we get cussed. Amen.

So I had fitted unofficially into one or two tight places and officialdom was therefore pleased to let down the bars that restrain the general tourist. But there was a third reason: I was utterly unknown in Hebron, and it is the unknown entity that upsets most calculations, like the joker in a pack of cards.

There were likely enough other reasons, but I did not know them. Behold Grim and me on a blossomy May morning, mounted on two Bikaneeri camels left over from the war, swinging along the road to Hebron in gorgeous sunshine at a cushiony, contenting clip.

The camels were less conspicuous in that landscape than the regulation Ford car would have been and you can't travel fast enough even with gasoline to get ahead of the wind-borne word of mouth that ever since the Deluge has proved nearly as quick, if not quite so truthful always as the telegraph. To make us even less worth comment we wore the Arab costume that fits even a white man into the picture, and is comfortable past belief. Our other clothes were in the saddle-bags.

I know why the Jews want Palestine. I would want it too, if the world weren't so full of other things I haven't yet seen and admired. You feel like Abraham, on camelback up in those hills, only without his responsibilities.

One of Abraham's direct descendants met us coming the other way, close to where the road winds by the Pools of Solomon. He was in a one-horse carriage of the mid-Victorian era, drawn by an alleged horse of about the same date or vintage. On his head was a Danbury-made Derby hat and he had a horse-shoe stick-pin in his necktie, his thumbs stuck into his suspenders and his feet on the seat in front. But he passed us the time of day in ancient Hebrew, and Grim, who has studied that language for Intelligence Department purposes, stopped to answer him.

At the end of half-a-dozen sentences it was obvious that Grim knew more of the language than the other did. The revival of dead speech takes time, and there are not so many in the country yet who can use the old tongue fluently although Zionists usually begin a conversation with it for propaganda purposes.

"Talk English," Grim suggested.

"What? You know English? Where d'you learn it?"

"In the States. Where else?"

"What? You lived in the States? What did you come back here for? Lots of room in the States for you fellers—good money—good living—get the vote an' everything. Where's your home now? Hebron?"

Grim nodded. The Jew pulled out a cigar.

"Well, I've just come from telling 'em in Hebron that they all ought to emigrate to the U.S.A."

"Would they listen?"

"Good listeners. They listened so good, they got my watch and chain while I was talkin', an' they'd have had my pocketbook if I hadn't locked it up in Jerusalem before I came away. Smoke cigars? Try this one. Say: if you come across a gold watch an' chain with the initials A.C. done on it in a monogram across the back, just send word to Aaron Cohen at the New Hotel Jerusalem, and there'll be a good reward for you. I went an' complained at the Governorate, but that schoolboy they've made governor can't do nothing about it. Take if from me, he's got no brains and no police-force. I'll buy the watch back and you tell 'em so—a good reward to whoever brings it, and no questions asked. Better have this cigar, hadn't you?"

But you don't smoke cigars on camelback, at least not if you want to avoid being taken for a foreigner.

"Was the watch valuable?" Grim asked him.

"Would I worry about it if it was a cheap one? If it was a nine-carat case d'you think I'd have called the young governor all the names I did, and risk my life in the *suk** afterwards against his orders, arguin' with a lot o' knifers? Eighteen-carat—twenty-two jewels—breguet spring—say: get me that watch back an' I'll give you twenty U.S. dollars for yourself!"

---

*Bazaar.

"Don't want 'em," said Grim, smiling down placidly from the superior height of the camel.

"What—you don't want dollars? Quit your kiddin'! There's nobody in this land don't want dollars."

"How badly d'you want that watch?"

"Oh, all right—twenty-five, then: but that's the limit."

"Dollars won't do. I know you for a good scout, Aaron Cohen, or I'd let you lose your watch for abusing young de Crespigny. That boy's got his hands full. How'd you like to be Governor of Hebron?"

"—— up! I'd sooner be King of the Irish! He's not a bad feller at that, only too thick with Arabs. He gave me a drink after I'd done criticising. But say: what do you know about me?"

"And your emigration business? Nearly as much as you do!"

"Who are you, anyway?"

"My name is Grim."

"What? Him they call Jimgrim? Pardon me! Somehow I *thought* you didn't talk like an Arab. Well, you're the very man I'm looking for. I want my watch back, Major Grim. I've got no money in my pocket or I'd give it to you, but there's fifty dollars you can use however you please, and I'll pay it on your say-so—no questions asked. Could anything be fairer than that?"

"D'you want it badly enough to turn back?"

"What—to that nest o' thieves? To Hebron? To El-Kalil? Um-m-m! I got no money for one thing."

"I'll lend you whatever you need."

"Your risk! If they skin it from me, it's your money!"

"All right."

"You must have some mighty strong reason for wanting me back in Hebron!"

"I have. You'll be all right for a day or two. There's a hotel."

"Yey—I been there. The bugs in it have red-hot bear-traps on their feet and the food ain't fit for niggers!"

"Well, d'you want the watch?"

"You'll get it for me?"

"Yes, if you turn back."

"Uh! If you were English I wouldn't trust you; I'd say you were kiddin' yourself or kiddin' me. Go on, I'll take a chance."

"See you at the hotel then."

Grim and I rode on and in five minutes hardly the dust of Cohen's carriage was visible behind us. We rode side by side, but it is not easy to talk from camel-back, although the beasts' feet make hardly any noise; I've a notion that the habitual reticence of the desert-folk is partly due to enforced silence for long periods on the march, when the swing and sway of the camels and the cloth over the rider's mouth make conversation next to impossible. Grim's information came in snatches.

"Good fellow, Cohen. Clever devil. Zionist. Thinks he can provide land here for Jews by encouraging Arabs to emigrate. Money behind him. Settle 'em on land in Arkansas and Tennessee. Kind fellow. Hot-air merchant. Good at bottom. Shrewd. Strange mixture of physical fear and impudent courage."

"What makes you so sure you can recover the watch?"

"Experience of Hebron. I was governor there once."

FOR an hour after that we padded along in silence through a country dotted with enormous herds of black goats in charge of patriarchal-looking shepherds. The only trees in sight were occasional ancient olives; but as we drew near Hebron the hillsides were all divided by stone walls into orchards and we passed between miles of grape-vines, interspersed with *mishmish*, as they call their apricots.

You don't see Hebron until the road begins to descend into it, and then the first view is of a neat modern village with the German influence predominant; for there, as everywhere else in Palestine, the Germans had not been content with making plans; they built good stone houses. The ancient city lies beyond all that, utterly untouched by science—a chaotic jumble flaunted in the face of discipline.

We stopped in front of the Governorate, and that, of course was a German building, a neat little residence with a garden in front and a stone wall all about it, in sight of the jail which, equally of course, was Turkish. The Turks built nothing so good as their jails and the Germans strengthened them, but it took the British to clean them of vermin, and filth and untried prisoners.

The Hebron jail is outside the city for more good reasons than one. Where ninety-nine per cent of a city's population is eligible for rigorous confinement on one ground or another and the cleverest thieves on earth are trained besides, no mere iron bars within the city limits would serve the purpose; you need open spaces all around for rifle and machine-gun fire—except of course, in famine time, when most of the population plans to be arrested and fed two square meals a day, at the foreign tax-payers' expense.

Captain de Crespigny came out of the Governorate to greet us, smiling all over as a man should whose only dependable assistant has the tooth-ache.

"You know the wire is down behind you?" he said pleasantly.

"Since when?"

"An hour ago. I'm rather worried about a Jew named Cohen. I let him start for Jerusalem this morning. 'Fraid now he may get scuppered on the way."

"It's all right; we met him. He's on his way back."

"Oh, did you get wind of trouble here?"

"Not a thing. Wanted Cohen here for a special reason. What's up?"

"I tried to phone through to Jerusalem for a machine gun. There's nobody to send. We've a motor-cycle, but it's *napoo.* That fellow Cohen lost his watch and I arrested a local Arab on suspicion soon after Cohen had gone. He's over there in the jail now and four thousand of his friends have sworn an oath to take him out again by force. I've ten policemen—one first-class man and nine with the wind up them."

"Are you sure the wire's down?" Grim asked him.

"Perfectly. I'd call that luck, only now you've come. They couldn't exactly have blamed me for bluffing the business through without orders and I think I could have tackled it. However, I suppose you take over?"

"Not if I know it!" Grim answered. "Make over to me when you've had enough, but no sooner."

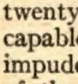
"Thanks. Come in and have a drink. Who's your friend?"

"Ramsden—a countryman of mine."

Grim introduced me and for the hundredth time in that man's land I experienced the unmitigated delight of being accepted as an equal, instead of as a possibly objectionable person, on the strength of his mere say-so. As a general rule you can't get past that suave screen the British use to camouflage their real thoughts, without a guide whom they know and trust; but when you're in, you're in.

De Crespigny was nothing unusual; clean-shaven, almost always laughing about something, looking about twenty although really twenty-six, probably not brilliant, but capable of swift judgment and astounding impudence in tight places. Obviously one of those well-bred young gentlemen, who have kept an empire's borders by daring and straight dealing while the politicians did the bragging and the profiteers made hay. He wore several ribbons for distinguished service, but the only thing he seemed really proud of was a mixture he called a Hebron cocktail, made without ice from a recipe of his own invention.

It was a comfortable room we entered, for the Germans had left their furniture behind them and the walls were hung besides with deadly weapons taken away from the local cut-throats by this de Crespigny child, his one assistant, the one bold native policeman and the "nine with the wind up them."



THE assistant came in while we watched the secret ritual of cocktail shaking in an ex-beer bottle; another boy, two years younger than his chief and, barring the tooth-ache, even more amused by the certainty that mass-murder was afoot. You could sum him up instantly. When a man thinks of his job first, and tooth-ache merely as a handicap, bet on him. Beside his name was Jones and that is a well-known label.

"Just come from the jail," he announced. "Had to put Ali ben Hamza in a cell by himself; he was propaganding among the other prisoners. Perfectly friendly, though; assured me that you and I will both be dead before morning and offered to pull my tooth out with his fingers. Said he hated to see me suffer and that having your throat cut doesn't hurt a bit."

"Thought you were going to the doctor," said de Crespigny.

"No time. He has his hands full anyhow. Hospital's chock-a-block, and no one to help him operate. Any news?"

"Wire's down."

"Oh, good! That means Jerusalem can't interfere and tell us not to do things. But—" glancing at Grim and me "—are you still in charge, 'Crep'?"

"I've no orders to take over," Grim assured him. "De Crespigny may pass the buck when he sees fit."

"Pretty decent of you."

"Suppose you fellows put me wise, though," Grim suggested. "We'll call it unofficial, but in case of need it might be wholesome for me to know the facts."

"It's all very simple," said de Crespigny. "Aaron Cohen came here with a scheme for exporting Arabs to your country to make room for Jews. He offers to buy out their holdings for cash, to arrange their passage to the States, get passports for them and all that, and provide them with good land to settle on at the other end on easy terms. Perfectly fair and above-board if they wanted to do it, but they don't.

"On top of that, the Jews in this place are Orthodox and hate the Zionists worse than they do pork. They made the mistake of telling the Arabs that Cohen was no good, whereas he's quite a decent fellow really, if it weren't for his infernal cheek. No need to tell *you* what the Moslems of this place are like. They stole Cohen's watch for a joke and he said what he thought of them. They admit the truth of all he said—you know how engagingly frank they are about themselves—but take exception to criticism by any kind of Jew.

"Now they say that the Orthodox Jews put Cohen up to it and only went back on him afterwards because they were afraid. They say it's really the Orthodox Jews of this place who are planning to get their holdings; and as most of them owe money to the Jews they propose to make short work of the lot of them. They've cut the wire to prevent our phoning for Sikhs and machine guns and the game is probably scheduled to begin tonight."

Before de Crespigny had finished speaking two men came into the room and one of them, obviously a middle-aged Scotsman, sat down without waiting to be invited. The other, an Arab long past middle age, remained standing. Grim made a sign to me that I interpreted as a call to behave in keeping with the Arab costumes we were wearing and I hid my face as much as I reasonably could in the folds of the *kufiyi*.

"*Allah ysabbak bilkhair!*"* the old Arab began as soon as he could get a word in.

"*Ahlan wasah'lan!*"† said de Crespigny. "What is it, Yussuf?"

"You young men go! Go to your mothers! Go home and marry wives!"

"Why this sudden interest in our future, Yussuf?"

"It is not sudden. I am an old man, and have seen many young men die. I have yet to see the good that came of killing them. Go home."

"Men die when their time comes," said de Crespigny. "Moreover, they don't marry wives in my land until the woman is willing. I've got no money and the girls won't look at me."

"It is not good to answer with jests when an old man speaks in earnest. I, who must see death soon in the natural course of things, advise you as a father speaking to his sons. Go home. It is better to beget sons than to die young."

"You old raven! What are you croaking about?"

The Arab stroked his gray beard and thought a minute before he answered. Then:

"I have seen the blood flow in the runnels of the streets of El-Kalil like red stormwater. I was here when the Turks took vengeance on the city for certain matters. I have seen the seven districts of the city at war with one another and the executions afterwards. All those are as nothing in comparison to what comes! It is written that not one Jew shall remain alive in El-Kalil!"

"Any date to that prophecy?" asked de Crespigny quite calmly.

"They are whetting the swords now!"

"They'll have us to reckon with before they begin on the Jews."

"Truly, my son. Therefore go, before the sacrifice begins! What can you few do against so many? Can you send for help? I think not. I am told the wire is cut. Could a horseman or man on foot get through to Jerusalem alive? Not he! They would let you escape, but not your messenger; and if you stay, you die!"

"Supposing I chose to run away, they'd be fools to let me," de Crespigny answered. "There'd be lorry-loads of Sikhs here two or three hours after I reached Jerusalem."

---

*Lit.: God give you a happy morning!
†A thousand times welcome!

"And the Sikhs will bury the dead Jews! Listen, my son. You British are not Turks. Who in this place is afraid of British vengeance, after living under the Turk's heel so many years. The Sikhs will come and shoot a handful. There will be a trial, at which every witness will tell lies. Those who have the fewest friends will be convicted; some will he hanged and some imprisoned. For four thousand Jews slain will forty Moslems hang? Better go before the sacrifice begins!"

"You go back into the city," said de Crespigny, as calmly as if he were ordering the streets cleaned, "and tell your friends this: There's only one authority in this place, and that's me! Say they have me to deal with before they can start on the Jews!"

"You and these few and ten policemen!" The old Arab smiled and spread out his hands in a gesture of something like despair. "They will go first to the jail, pillage it and set the prisoners free. Next they will come here, for there are rifles here and cartridges. In less time than the muezzin needs to cry his summons they will slay you and take the rifles. After the Jews! And after that, if it is written that the Sikhs shall come, then that is written, and who shall stay the hand of God?"

"Go and tell them to come here first before they try the jail," said de Crespigny calmly. "That is all I have to say. Go and tell them."

"*Allah ysallmak!*"[*] said the Arab sadly.

"*Allah yihfazak!*"[†] de Crespigny replied, and the old man turned and went.

"Doc.," said de Crespigny, turning toward the Scotsman, "there are two camels outside. Better take them. Put Miss Gordon on one and you and she make a break for Jerusalem. This situation looks none too good."

Doctor Cameron laughed drily, wrinkling up his eyes as he looked keenly at each of us in turn. He was a big man, with a powerful head and a firm, good-tempered mouth under a scraggly gray moustache. He looked like an old soldier, but had never actually worn any other uniform than the mask and apron of the operating-room.

"Five-and-twenty years I've been here," he replied. "Can you see me running away?"

"But the nurse—Miss Gordon?"

"She's a fine girl. She'll stand by. Ask her if you'd rather. I'll not interfere."

"Better send her to this place, then."

"You young Hector! She's safer in my hospital. They'll do no murder there; we're far too useful to them. I stood by them through the war as a Turks' prisoner; they'll remember that. There's hardly a man in Hebron hasn't been to me for help at one time or another. But what do you lads propose to do?"

"Brazen it out," said de Crespigny.

"You'll need all your brass, I'm thinking." He looked hard at Jones. "That boy's in no fit state to give the best that's in him. I brought my bag with me. Let me see that lower jaw."

He took Jones' head in capable, enormous hands and tilted it toward the light.

"Open. Wider. Um-m-m! Sit on that stool. Reach me the bag, de Crespigny."

He unwrapped a lancet and a pair of ugly forceps, then got behind Jones and gripped his head firmly between his knees.

"By rights ye ought to have an anæsthetic for a job like this, but your mother had to endure a lot worse when ye came into the world. We'll see if you're half as good a man as your mother. Now!"

It was a bloody business and not convenient to watch, but we all looked on like spectators at a play, pretending not to feel the skin creep up our spines. It was several minutes before the last piece of a broken tooth was tossed into the brass basin that a servant brought.

"Now lie down. If I ever meet your mother I'll tell the lady that her labor was worth while. Ye'll feel finely by and by. He might have an ounce or two of whisky."

He wrapped up his tools, turned down his shirt-sleeves, and started for the door.

"If I can be of any further use, my boys, ye'll know where to find me. The best advice I can give is, always let the Arab know you're not afraid of him, and make him suspect ye've something in reserve. And by the way—ye'd better all join me at the hospital, if things look too bad. I think the rascals will respect that place. There'll be bad news from Jerusalem before night or my name isn't Cameron."

De Crespigny glanced swiftly at Grim. Grim nodded. That was puzzling, for there had been no signs of disturbance that I could see when we came away that morning.

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[*] God save you!

[†] God keep you!

Cameron jerked his head and snapped his fingers in the doorway.

"They'd never talk so bold here if they didn't know of trouble brewing in Jerusalem to keep the troops occupied," he said, and strode out as if any sort of trouble were the merest commonplace.

I found it utterly impossible, sitting in that quiet room, to believe that we were in imminent danger; but that may have been because I had no official job to lose if everything should go wrong. A man doesn't fear for his life as a rule until the raw facts stare him in the face; it is economic and administrative problems that cause terror in advance. I thought that even Grim, who hardly ever shows more emotion than the proverbial red Indian in times of stress, looked serious.

And some one else arrived just then, who took no trouble to conceal his feelings. Aaron Cohen had himself announced by the Arab servant and followed him into the room without waiting for an invitation. He did not speak at first, but stood looking from one to the other of us with an expression on his face mixed of comedy and desperation.

"Nice way to bring a feller back to this place!" he said at last. "I went to the hotel and they wouldn't let me in. Said they'd trouble enough in store without me. Gave me a fine talk, they did. Pogrom—that's the name of it! Down at that hotel they're saying all the Jews in Hebron will be dead before morning and they're blaming me for it. What have I done?" He faced Grim and glared at him. "D'you call that acting on the level, to bring me back to this place when you knew what was in the air?"

"You'd never have reached Jerusalem alive," said de Crespigny.

"Has that young feller been knifed?" asked Cohen, pointing at Jones on the couch. He was still spitting blood at intervals, so the question was excusable.

"Sit down, Cohen," Grim answered. "You're as safe here as anywhere at present. Will you have his bag brought in, de Crespigny? Now, Cohen, you didn't start this trouble, but your talk brought it to a head. It's up to us to smooth the thing out if we can, but it's going to be no joking matter. I'm asking you to keep quiet and to help us if there's an opportunity. Will you?"

"Sure, I'll help," said Cohen. "But what can I do?"

"Dunno yet," Grim answered. "Captain de Crespigny's in charge. We'll see."

CHAPTER II

"These are two good boys."

THE Scots doctor's prognostications were proven accurate sooner than expected. Rumor travels on swallow's wings in that land and almost as soon as Cohen's bag had been carried in there came a native policeman looking pallid under the bronze, who saluted precisely and then talked to de Crespigny and Jones with the familiarity of an old nurse to children.

"Word has come that the Jews in Jerusalem are massacring Moslems! Shall ten of us prevent the Moslems here from turning the tables on the Jews? Better let it be known at once that we intend to stand aside. Then let them get the business over with. Afterward will be the proper time to make arrests."

He looked like a perfectly good policeman, but there had not been time enough yet to educate out of him Turkish notions of convenience.

"Who brought the news?" asked de Crespigny.

"He is outside."

"Bring him in."

A burly-looking ruffian with more white to his eye than sheer straightforwardness begets, clad in a smelly sheepskin coat and with a long knife tucked into his sash, was ushered in and stood uncomfortably in the middle of the room.

"Are you from Jerusalem?" de Crespigny asked him.

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"I have just come."

"And you left Hebron after seven o'clock this morning to my knowledge! Have you got so virtuous and truthful that you've suddenly grown wings?"

"I went half-way and met three men, who said the Jews of Jerusalem have risen and have already killed three thousand Moslems. So I came back."

"To talk about it, eh? Well, if I hear of your repeating such a lie in Hebron I'll clap you in the jail, d' you understand me? Go home and hold your tongue."

"*Taib.*"*

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*All right.

The man slouched out again, but three more reports arrived by way of the back door within the next ten minutes, the last one giving the total of slain at exactly four thousand eight hundred and one Moslems, adding that the Jews were parading through Jerusalem in triumph.

"All of which probably means that a Jew has been killed and the Moslems are looting," Grim commented quietly.

The next alarm was a message from the Arab jailer to say that his prisoners were getting out of hand and that a crowd was collecting outside the jail.

Jones volunteered to go and investigate, but before he could leave the room two policemen came running in with word that the crowd was swarming up-street toward the Governorate. We could hear them a moment later. They were taking their time about it, singing as they came, pausing at intervals to dance a few steps in measure and then surging on. The song was like the Carmagnole of the Terror. De Crespigny got up from his chair—thought better of it—sat down again and lighted a cigaret. After that he passed the case around and we each took one, Cohen included.

"What's going to happen?" asked Cohen. "Those guys coming to kill us?" He looked less afraid than I felt. "Well, I guess it's up to you fellers to fix this."

"I'll go out and talk to them," said de Crespigny.

"Take your time," Grim advised him. "Let them wait for you."

It was obvious that de Crespigny and Jones felt better for Grim's being there, although to my mind he was stretching his policy of non-interference to absurd limits. I had seen enough of his influence with Arabs at one time and another to convince me that he could do nearly what he liked with them and I itched to tell him to take charge and use his resourceful wits. He made no move whatever, but sat like a wooden Indian in front of a tobacco store, blowing out the cigaret-smoke through his nose.

The crowd—there must have been two or three thousand of them—came thundering up-street, chanting over and over again a rape-and-murder chorus in response to the stanzas of a solo sung by a man who was carried shoulder-high in their midst waving a sword. I could see his sword through the window, over the top of the shrubs and the stone wall. They halted in front of the gate and the song ceased. In the silence that followed when the shuffling of feet had died down you could hear them breathe.

"I suppose they'll swipe our camels?" I suggested.

"Not yet," Grim answered. "They'll do nothing much yet unless they think we're rattled. Take your time, de Crespigny."

The Governor of Hebron got out of his chair again with all the stately dignity of twenty-six amusing years, and lighted another cigaret with a deliberately steady hand.

"Do I look as if I'd got the wind up me, or any rot like that?" he asked.

"You look good," Grim assured him. "Be sure you smile, though. You'll pull it off all right."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Jones.

"No. Better not. They might think we were scared, if two of us went. So long."

De Crespigny walked out, doing the most difficult thing in the world perfectly, which is to act exactly like your normal self when fear is prompting you to bluster and look preternaturally clever. Jones began talking in a matter-of-fact voice to Cohen about his emigration scheme.

"Care to come with me?" asked Grim; and he and I went upstairs to watch from a bedroom window, screening ourselves carefully behind the curtains.

"These are two good boys," said Grim. "More depends on them than you guess. If they can hold Hebron quiet for two days, all's well. If not, the next thing will be a march on Jerusalem, and every Moslem in the country is likely to follow suit."

"Couldn't the British machine guns deal with that?"

"Of course. But who wants to slaughter 'em?"

"Pity the wire's down," said I.

"Uh-uh! Wouldn't be any good. All the troops Jerusalem could spare would only whet these fellows' appetites for blood. Judging by the symptoms before we came away I should say Jerusalem will have its hands full for the next forty-eight hours or so. But watch de Crespigny."

THE crowd in the street was packed so densely that those nearest were pressed against the gate and de Crespigny could not open it. There was only one gap in their midst, where one of our camels lay and the other stood moving his jaw phlegmatically. Camels get excited only when they shouldn't, and insist on taking human climaxes with the indifference they possibly deserve; those two beasts were the only meditative creatures within view, although the crowd was silent enough—sweating in the hot sun—a sea of faces set in the white frames of *kufiyis*, angry, but intensely anxious to know what this youngster of an alien race proposed to do.

De Crespigny did not hesitate. He vaulted on to the wall, stood on it for a minute to judge the number of the crowd and get a bird's-eye view of what was happening on its outskirts, then sat down on the wall facing them, with his feet hanging on a level with their breasts. They could have seized him easily. A fool would have stood up and tried to look dignified out of reach.

"Now, don't all speak at once," he began. "What do you want?"

Of course they all did speak at once, at the top of their lungs for the most part and he waited until the tumult died.

"Suppose one or two of you speak for the rest," he suggested at last.

A burly man of middle age took that duty on himself and de Crespigny had to draw his legs up, for the men in front were crushed tight against the wall by those behind who wanted to hear better. So he set his feet on the shoulders of the men beneath him and they seemed rather to like it.

"We are told that the Jews in Jerusalem are murdering our coreligionists!"

"I've heard that story too," said de Crespigny. "If it's true, it's bad."

"Give us rifles, then! We are going to Jerusalem to help our friends!"

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. The military might mistake your motive; then there'd be an accident. Let's find out the truth first; I'm as keen to know it as you are. Tell you what: the wire's down, so I can't phone, but see those two camels. Why don't you choose two men whose word you can depend on, let them take those camels, and bring back word? I'll write a pass that will get them by the guard outside Jerusalem; and I'll give them a letter asking the authorities to let them see what's happening. How about it?"

The sweet reasonableness of that offer was too much even for their fanaticism, but there were men at the back of the crowd to whom it did not appeal for various reasons—the chief of them, no doubt, that it postponed the hour of looting.

"Ali Baba ben Hamza is in the jail on a Jew's complaint!" they yelled. "Let him out! Give him back to us!"

"Certainly not!" laughed de Crespigny. "I've had most of you in the jail at one time or another! Which of you was ever jailed unfairly? Ali Baba ben Hamza stays in until he's had a fair trial. Anything else?"

"How do we know the Jews in the jail haven't killed him already?"

"You know quite well I'd never let them. There are only three Jews in the jail, and Ali Baba has a cell to himself. However—choose a committee of five or six of you, and I'll issue a permit for the committee to visit him and make sure."

"Let him out! Let him out!"

"Certainly not! Choose your committee if you want to. But you're wasting time. Send two men to Jerusalem on the camels and bring us all back that news."

"Kill him!" yelled some one from behind, but no other voice repeated it and the man who had made the suggestion was elbowed further to the rear. De Crespigny pretended not to have heard.

"I could recognize that fellow again," said I.

"Never mind him," Grim answered.

"You'd all better go away now and wait in your homes until the camels get back," said de Crespigny. "I'll see the head-men inside the city in the *mejliss** hall half an hour from now. Take care that all the head-men come! Who are going on the camels? What are their names?"

It did not take them a minute to choose delegates, for among Arabs there never seems any doubt as to which man's evidence is to be preferred before that of others. De Crespigny took their names, vaulted off the wall, and went into the house to write a pass for them. Before he returned with it the crowd had already begun to disperse, relieving the pressure so that he could open the gate this time and go out among them. The pass was written in English for the benefit of British sentries, but he read it aloud to the nearest men, translating into Arabic to satisfy them that they were not being tricked; and the moment the camel-men were off the crowd went too, in the opposite direction. They seemed to have forgotten about Ali Baba ben Hamza in the jail.

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*Council.

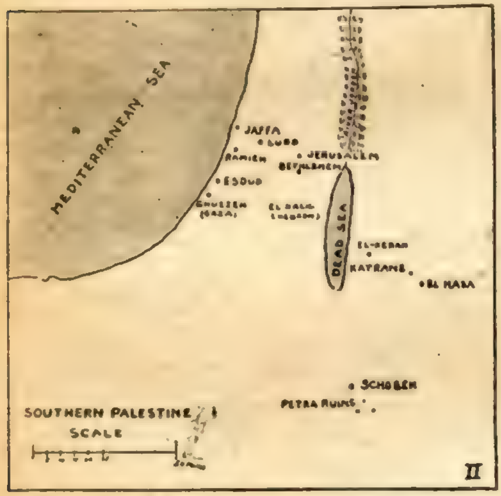
"That gives us eight hours' breathing space at all events," de Crespigny laughed when we rejoined him in the room downstairs. "Next question is what to do with it. I'll interview the head-men presently and use strong language, but what after that?"

"Stage a side-show," Grim answered.

"Easy to say, but what? How?"

"Suppose we call that my end?" Grim suggested.

"All right, sir. That'll suit me." De Crespigny turned to Jones. "How's the jaw now? I think perhaps you'd better show yourself in the city. Walk about the place and show them we're not panicky; it'll do our policemen as much good as any one to see we're cool and on the job. How many men are on guard outside the jail?"



"Three."

"Take one away. Tell the other two they're such fine fellows that two's plenty. Let the third man walk through the streets behind you, it'll do his guts good. I'll stroll about too, after I've seen the head-men. Meet here for dinner, eh? Leave you to your own devices, I suppose?" he added, smiling cheerfully at Grim.

"Yes. I shall visit the jail first. So long."

Cohen heaved a huge sigh as de Crespigny and Jones walked out.

"Eight hours, eh? Well, that's something! But why, if two o' them knifers can go to Jerusalem on camels, can't some other feller go and ask for troops? What this place needs is Sikhs—lots of 'em, with the corks off the end o' their bayonets! Why not indent for a regiment quick an' lively?"

"Because," Grim answered slowly, "they've plenty to worry them just now in Jerusalem without our adding to it. The troops at Ludd are being held in readiness to go elsewhere and all the men in Jerusalem are hardly enough to keep order. If we can't handle this without the Sikhs, we're 'it,' that's all."

"And you're going out? And him? He going with you? I'm to sit alone in this place? What d'you take me for?"

"A man."

"Say; I'll go with you to the jail!"

"Uh-uh! Jews indoors just now! If the Arabs were to fall foul of you and draw blood, there'd be no stopping them. Sit here and read. You'll be all right."

I felt strong sympathy for Cohen. Perhaps what Grim had said of him while we were on the way had something to do with that, but I think I would have liked him in any case, not being one of those unfortunates so prejudiced that they loathe Jews simply because there was once a man named Judas. There were and are others.

Grim was obviously working him thoughtfully, no doubt in order to bring to the top the particular quality or mood he then had use for—that being Grim's way. I have never known him try to convert a man, or waste much time on futile argument; so far as I have been able to analyze Grim's method from close study of it, I should say he accepts the world exactly as he finds it and then looks keenly for something he can use. He invariably seems to find it somewhere in the heap, although not by any means always on top.

"Doin' things is easy," Cohen grumbled. "Sittin' still expectin' things to happen is what eats you."

"All the same, sit here," Grim answered. "There'll be plenty for you to do presently. We shall need the use of your wits and all your pluck. Out in the street they'd very likely kill you and I've never seen a dead man's brains real active. I'm off to get your watch."

"Shucks! Let 'em keep it! Don't get startin' more trouble!"

"Did you ever see a forest fire in the States checked by setting another one?"

Grim answered. "Sit tight, Cohen; we'll be back for dinner."

But we did not start out in the Arab clothes we were still wearing. Upstairs in de Crespigny's bedroom Grim got into his major's uniform and I changed into flannels —it was hot enough for a bathing suit. The room was full of curios de Crespigny had picked up in the course of eight years' foreign service and Grim used up a minute or two studying a picture of Japanese Shintoist priests performing the "Hi-Watterai" stunt of walking barefooted on a bed of burning charcoal.

"Who was it said that about the world being full of a number of things?" he remarked. "Are you ready? Come on."

In the street he began to let fall little scraps of information in that aggravating way he has, that starts you conjecturing and guessing until you realize that you know less than you thought you did before.

"This old Ali Baba ben Hamza that de Crespigny has put in jail is the very man I left Jerusalem to come and see. He's the father of Mahommed ben Hamza, who helped us at El-Kerak* you remember, and again to some extent at Ludd.† The old boy has sixteen sons and grandsons, and they're about the toughest gang this side of Chicago. If they've got Cohen's watch we ought to be able to stave off a holy war."

"I never heard anything sound more like a complete *non sequitur*," said I.

"Thieving has been a poor trade in Hebron lately," he answered. "When professional thieves come on hard times, Ramsden, they pray for trouble as a rule and usually help to start it, with a view to loot. There've been strange doings by night in this town of late. Let's hope Doc Cameron has plenty of chemicals."

"What on earth for?"

"We've got to stage a bluff or go fluey."

It was not far to the jail and there were not many people in the street to see us pass; but those who did see us recognized Grim and were respectful, if not exactly obviously glad to know he was in town. I saw one man go running off in the direction of the city to carry the news.

The jail was a long stone structure with a stone roof and iron-barred windows, looking not altogether unlike an American armory on a small scale. The two dark-gray uniformed policemen on guard outside it became suddenly possessed by a new spirit at sight of Grim and beamed at him as they presented arms. He stopped for a minute to address each of them by name and make some familiar joke in Arabic.

"Nothing to be afraid of," he assured them.

They laughed, shrugged their shoulders and seemed to revert at once to their former state of gloom.

"If only there were Sikhs here! Our two officers are very young and there are only ten of us! The men in the city are calling us traitors, being Moslems born in this place yet taking the pay and obeying the orders of the British, who are foreigners! And now come these tales from Jerusalem! We are willing to die like men but, in the name of God, Jimgrim, this is no joking matter!"

"Who am I, that you should think I joke about it?" Grim answered. "I am a foreigner. I take the pay and obey the orders of the British. They and you and I, are here to keep the peace, that is all. Our honor is concerned in the matter. There is more honor in being ten than ten thousand, when the ten are right and the others wrong. As for the youth of your officers—which would you prefer, young capables or old fools?"

"True—true, Jimgrim! We will stand! Depend on us!"

"Those fellows' property would be the first to be looted, if looting should begin," said Grim as we entered the jail. "It's a —— of a test for men who were fighting for the Turks two years ago! The rest of us think we're men of principle and all that, but we don't know what temptation is! I'd like to know I was as brave as one of those policemen."

The jail was as clean as the proverbial new pin, divided up on the Turkish system into stone-floored cells, with room in each for twenty or thirty miserables on occasion, although now there were only two or three men clad in coarse jail suits who peered through each barred door curiously. They looked fat and on the whole not dissatisfied.

THE cell we sought was at the far end, and it seemed empty; but the Arab jailer who had followed us unlocked it and slammed the iron door shut again in a hurry behind us, as if afraid some

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*"The Adventure at El-Kerak." Nov. 10th, 1921, *Adventure*.

†"The Iblis at Ludd." Jan 10th, 1922, *Adventure*.

wild beast might escape. Yet all we found inside was a meek-looking old patriarch with a long blue-gray beard, who sat in a corner telling amber beads so piously that he could hardly spare us attention. They had not dressed him in a jail suit; he was arrayed in all the full-flowing Arab dignity that is very far from being a mere mask. It is the outward and visible sign of an inner quality that makes those who know the Arab well prefer to condone his roguery.

"*Mar'haba*, Ali Baba!"

"*Allah y'afik*, Jimgrim! It is time! Behold the indignity to which that young whelp of an Englishman has put me! I have grandsons older than him! Yet he put me in this cell, laughing when I cursed him, as if an old man's curse had no weight. When I threatened him, he offered me tobacco—the young spawn of an adder! Tell the jailer to bring in two chairs, Jimgrim, and some tea, so that I can offer you hospitality! You and your friends will all be dead by midnight, but what of it? There is no malice between me and thee. Speak through the door to the jailer."

CHAPTER III

"But we be honest men!"

GRIM sat down on one of the clean stone floor-slabs and leaned his back against the wall.

"It is not good, Ali Baba, to see you in this place," he said.

"*Mashallah!* It is easy to spare your feelings, Jimgrim. Say the word to the jailer and you shall see me in the street in a minute!"

I sat down opposite and watched. Grim's expression was wholly of good humor, but under the old Arab's mask of friendly dignity I thought I could detect suppressed excitement. His eyes—soft-brown as a doe's—had fire behind them and he kept on telling his beads automatically, flicking each one forward with his thumb, as if in some way that relieved internal pressure.

"Have you been searched?" Grim asked him unexpectedly.

"No. I have suffered all indignities but that. *Inshallah*,* I shall be spared the searching and the prison bath."

"Suppose you give me Aaron Cohen's watch, then."

Grim held his hand out. The Arab shook his head.

"The Jew's watch? To the —— with the Jew and the watch as well! I know nothing of either of them."

"I suppose," said Grim considerately, "when a man gets to your age, Ali Baba, his memory usually fails. Well, never mind; here is a nice clean cell, where you can sit and refresh your memory. Meditation may bring recollection. There is no hurry."

"Truly no hurry! Before dawn I shall be free. If the Jew still needs a watch by that time, the thing can be buried with him."

"You think the crowd is coming to release you, eh?"

The old man nodded.

"You are wrong," said Grim.

"If not tonight, then tomorrow night."

"That would bring sure eventual disaster on themselves, if they try to take you out of here by force."

"Am I not Ali Baba? They will come."

"Ali Baba, the thief!"

"Ali Baba ben Hamza, the captain of thieves!"

The old man made that boast as proudly as ever Roman captain gloried in his legion, and Grim smiled comprehendingly.

"You're not going to be here when they come, old friend. We'll save them the trouble of pulling the jail down."

"Ah! That is wisest, Jimgrim. To spoil this good jail were a pity. And there are mean rascals in here whom they would release, but who ought to remain for the hangman. It is best to let me go; you were always a man of discernment."

"Who mentioned letting you go?" Grim retorted, letting his face grow suggestively harder. "There is a less troublesome way than that."

"Allah! *Shi muhal!** You would hang me? You?"

"Not necessarily—at least, not yet. Do you think you know me?"

"As a father his son; as a farmer knows the weather; as a fox the hunter! Were you not once governor here?"

"Am I a liar?"

"Nay. A deceiver. A cunning and most bold contriver and twister of surprizes. A man who smothers knowledge under smiles. A follower of dark ways. A danger, because of great subtlety and daring. But no liar.

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*If God wills.

*What does this talk mean?

When you say a thing, Jimgrim, whoever has good sense believes it."

"Believe me now, then. You shall hang before you are rescued. Neither your sixteen sons and grandsons, nor any mob incited by them shall get you alive out of our hands."

"Allah! You talk boldly, Jimgrim!"

"I have pledged my word."

"*Shu halalk!** I know the situation. Jerusalem can spare no troops. There is going to be short shrift in El-Kalil, and none can prevent it. Nevertheless, you shall have the Jew's watch, if that is all you want of me."

"It is not all."

"Then what else?"

"Give me the watch first."

"It is not here. On my honor, Jimgrim, in the name of the Most High God and of his Prophet, it is not here!"

"I thought not. Let me feel under your girdle. Not there? Under your arm? No. In the leg of your pantaloons then? Ah! I knew I'd heard it ticking."

Grim drew up the old man's cotton trousers and exposed the hairy leg. The watch was suspended by its gold chain just below the knee.

"So that's attended to. Now we'll go out of here and make you more comfortable at the Governorate. Cohen is there. You may give him the watch yourself if you'd rather."

"You will take me to the Governorate? *Taib!*† They will burn that place down instead of this!"

"All right, they'd better. Cost less. Come along."

Grim called the jailer who let us out in a hurry and seemed more glad to be rid of that mild-looking old gentleman than if he had had horns and a tail; but he took care to have Grim make the necessary entries in the prison book, and returned to Ali Baba the sweetest, slivery, long, gold-handled dagger in an ivory sheath that ever I set eyes on. I offered to buy it from him right away, but he saw only humor in that.

"You shall have it in your belly before morning!" he assured me. "Keep your money until then!"

Take him on the whole he was the most delightful rascal I had met in Palestine. It was a sheer pleasure to walk the street in his company, Grim on one side and I on the other, lest he take it into that old splendid head of his to make a break for liberty. The very stride of the man was poetry; every gesture was romance. He was inconvertible to modern ways and incorruptible by modern thought—past history incarnate and unwilling to depart from ancient manners; as conventional in his own way as any of the ancient kings who once made war on Abraham.

YOU would have thought he owned the Governorate by the way he entered it and the lecture he gave Aaron Cohen before returning his watch might have been taken out of the Book of Genesis.

"A rash man and his goods are like the wheat and the chaff," he told him. "A wind blows and they are separated. Yet there is compassion even for fools, and the heart of the wise discerns it. I am not willing to be enriched with your goods, lest you should meditate envy and bring evil into the world; for the little are envious and only the great have understanding. I give you back your watch."

"Is he to have the fifty dollars for it?" Cohen asked. "A feller with a nerve like him don't need money, but I'll stand by what I said to you."

"Does he speak of money? Tell him to think rather on damnation that awaits him after death!" said Ali Baba, turning his back. "I offered you tea in the jail, Jimgrim."

Grim chuckled.

"Shall I order tea? It's too bad the Koran forbids wine."

"Whisky is not wine. I have read the Koran through two hundred times and never found the word whisky mentioned in it."

Grim set a whisky bottle down on the table in front of him and the old man helped himself to a tumblerful.

"Now," said Grim, "we'll send for your sixteen sons and grandsons. Write them an invitation."

He set paper and ink in front of him and looked on, smiling like the Sphinx.

"No, that won't do. Try again. Take another sheet. Nothing about politics this time. Tell them you're out of jail and quite comfortable in the Governorate as my guest. Say you've some advice to give

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*"What talk is this?"
†"All right."

them and that they can come without fear, all sixteen of them."

"But they will be busy. They are preparing certain matters."

"I know it. I won't interfere. They may go away afterward and make all the preparations they like."

Ali Baba wrote painstakingly and passed the finished note to Grim, who studied it for half a minute before calling a servant.

"To Mahommed ben Hamza in the *suk*.* Come straight back here. Don't wait for an answer or stop to answer questions."

The man went off at a run and Grim sat down in the window-seat.

"Come and sit by me, Ali Baba. Now, you infernal old scoundrel, let's understand each other. I'm going to watch you like a fox stalking a bird, and I warn you not to make one signal to your gang. If you want to know what I'll do if you disobey me, just make one signal to your gang and see! These boys here made a mistake, didn't they, when they clapped you in jail? That gave you a chance to stir ructions, didn't it? And get rescued and fill your caves with loot after the rioting. Well, you'll tell that gang of yours that you're out of jail now, so that part of the program that called for an attack on the jail is off—absolutely off—you understand?"

Ali Baba nodded. His eyes were watching Grim's intently, trying to read the plan behind the spoken word.

"They'll ask you whether you're free yet. You'll answer what?"

"I am not free—*yet!*"

"No. That's the wrong answer. By the time they get here you will be free."

"*Taib!* I am willing! I will go with them."

"Yes. But you and I will have a private understanding first."

What struck me most as I watched the faces of the two men was a difference less of nationality and thirty years or so than of a couple of dozen centuries. And in spite of cunning and cocksureness won by half a century of practically unpunished and profitable crime; in spite of the fact, clear enough by now, that the Arab could count confidently on thousands of his fanatical friends to use direct force against us, who were an insignificant handful, for the moment out of reach of help, the impersonation of past history looked helpless against the young American.

I suspected Grim of being up to his old game of spotting the spark of elemental decency that is always hidden somewhere and fanning it into flame for his own use. Cohen, who knew Arabic better than I did, seemed equally aware of reenforcements not yet seen. The expression on the Jew's face was of masked alertness, as distinguished from Grim's businesslike good humor.

"I know your game," said Grim. "See if I don't. There's a Moslem insurrection in Jerusalem, of which you've had full advance particulars. There's trouble in Egypt and Constantinople that keeps the army at Ludd under orders for instant service elsewhere; some one has told you of that, too. I'll deal with that some one later. You've had it in for the Jews here for a long time——"

"*Fi idak!** They lend money to Moslems and collect the debts in the governor's court! It is forbidden by the Koran to lend money at usury."

"And you figure that the moment is therefore auspicious for a massacre."

"*Haida haik.*† It is going to take place."

"You know there will be punishment afterward."

"Perhaps that is written."

"But as you don't propose to murder any Jews yourself, or at any rate don't intend to be seen murdering them, and have plenty of friendly witnesses in any case, you yourself expect to get off scot-free with lots of loot. Isn't that so?"

"I shall prove an alibi."

"I know you will! I'm going to help you!"

"*Mashallah!* What does this talk mean?"

"You have a son, by name Mahommed ben Hamza."

"Truly. My youngest. He will be here soon."

"When I came here to act as governor a year ago, he was in the jail under sentence of death."

"Truly. But the charge was false. The witnesses had lied."

"Do you remember who set him free?"

Ali Baba did not answer, but the expression of his eyes changed and by just the fraction of an inch he hung his head. He looked even better that way—more patriarchal than ever, blending savagery and humility.

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*Bazaar.

*That is certainly so!

†Quite true.

"Do you remember the talk you and I had at the time I set him free? I knew who had done the murder he was to have been hanged for, didn't I?"

"It was no murder," the old man answered. "That man's father slew my father. It was justice."

"Nevertheless, you committed legal murder and I might have hanged you. What says the Koran? Does it bid return evil for good? Does it say in the Koran that a captain of thieves has no honor and need not keep promises? What are you and I—friends or enemies?"

"Jimgrim, you know I am your friend! All my sons and grandsons are your friends. You know it!"

"That is what I have been told, but I have yet to see it proved."

"What can I do? I am an old man. Can I stay a massacre by wagging a gray beard in the *suk?*"

"That remains to be seen. I will tell you what I have done. I have a true friend in Jerusalem—a friend unto death. Also, those in authority in Jerusalem listen when I speak; to them I gave certain writings, sealed before I came away this morning. It was known how serious the situation is in this place; so it was agreed before I came away that if these boys de Crespigny and Jones should be killed—and of course I shall die with them in that case——"

"God forbid, Jimgrim!"

"Then that seal shall be broken, and because of what shall be found written the first to be hanged when reprisals begin shall be the sixteen sons and grandsons of Ali Baba ben Hamza. But the seal shall not be broken otherwise."

"Jimgrim, shall the sons be slain for the father's fault? That is not justice!"

"But concerning Ali Baba ben Hamza himself I made a different agreement. I said to that friend of mine in Jerusalem, who is a friend unto death: 'Ali Baba ben Hamza of El-Kalil,' said I, 'has said he is my friend, but hitherto has not yet proved it. At this time my life will be in Ali Baba's hands. If he keeps faith, well; but if not, attend thou to it, making sure meanwhile that the bayonet is sharp.' "

"A bayonet? That is no thing to mention between friends, Jimgrim!"

"No, but between enemies a final argument! I claim you as a friend. But if you are not willing, I shall know what to do next. It is doubtless written whether I am to die or not at this time; but the consequence of that is also written and the fruits of the tree of friendship, Ali Baba, are always sweeter than the excrements of enmity!"

"What can I do? I am old. And the fire is laid!"

"Can the old not keep their promises? Are the old ungrateful? Do the old, because they are old, forget their friends?"

"Nay, Jimgrim, on the contrary! But you must not be too hard with me."

The only thing about Grim that suggested militarism was his uniform. Shut your eyes to that and he was a business man driving a difficult bargain through to completion. His iron eyes were steady, but not overbearing; they looked capable of dreaming as well as of discriminating, and faithful beyond measure. His voice too, had a quality of sympathy, so that when he was most threatening he seemed most persuasive; and along with the good-tempered smile there was an ability that neither words nor attitude expressed, but that was unmistakable—to understand and allow for the other fellow's point of view.

"Is it hard, O captain of thieves, to keep faith?" he asked.

"To keep faith?" Ali Baba paused and stroked his beard. "That is all that God asks of any man. But it is often very difficult."

"I shall keep faith with you," Grim answered, smiling genially. "You owe me two lives—yours and your youngest son's."

"*Taib!* I will pay two lives. Nay, I will do better; I will repay fifteen for the two! Seventeen for two! Thy life, Jimgrim, and the two youngsters who have tried to rule here and these—even this Jew—the doctor at the mission hospital and the woman who helps him and your ten policemen; go all of you, and on my head be it if harm befalls you on the way! Go safely to Jerusalem. I give you leave to go!"

Grim laughed and leaned back to light a cigaret. It did not seem to me that he had won his case, but he acted as if there were almost nothing more to talk about, and Ali Baba's old brown eyes beamed with a new light.

"You have spoken, Ali Baba. Seventeen for two, and we'll call the account balanced. But the seventeen are yourself and your sixteen sons. And the account—that shall be the account I shall give of El-Kalil when

I return to Jerusalem. My life and the life of all these is on the heads of Ali Baba and his sixteen sons and grandsons!"

"Allah!"

"Certainly," said Grim. "Let Allah witness!"

Then Ali Baba did a thing that hardly fitted into the modern frame. He stood up and I thought he was going to denounce us all, for he was trembling and his lips quivered. His eyes were on Grim's, as steady as the Westerner's now, and for the space of half a minute he stood erect, seeming to grow in height as the dignity of olden days descended on him. Then, to my astonishment and Cohen's, he took Grim's hand and bowed and kissed it.

"It is written," he said. "Life for life. Friendship in return for friendship. In this affair thy way and mine are one, Jimgrim."

Grim nodded.

"I knew you'd do the right thing, Ali Baba. Now sit down again and let's discuss the details. When your sons and grandsons come what do you propose to say to them?"

"Let your heart speak to them with my tongue. Surely they will listen."

"What do you suggest?"

"Nay, I am in your hands. We seventeen are thieves, but we be honest men. With our lives and all that we have we are your servants until this affair is over."

"There hasn't got to be any affair," said Grim.

"Allah! I have seen a tree stand up against the hail, but the hail fell. I have seen the stones withstand the locusts, but the locusts came. Shall a river turn backwards in its course because Jimgrim bids it and seventeen thieves stand with him and say yes?"

"What is your story then, about you and your sixteen working miracles?"

"That is different. That is the fire-gift that we won by entering the tomb of Abraham."

"You've been using it by all accounts to stir up the city for a massacre of Jews."

"Truly. Fire begat fire in men's hearts. Shall it now put out the fire it lit?"

"Certainly."

"Allah! *Shi muhal!* You speak in riddles, Jimgrim!"

"Not I. Tell your sons and grandsons to repeat their miracle tonight. You'd better go along and help them. See that you all do your best. Only, instead of proclaiming that the massacre should be tonight, you must announce that tomorrow is the great night."

"And then?"

"Simply this—if a greater miracle than yours should take place tomorrow night, admit it. Confess that it is greater than yours and tell the crowd that it puts yours in the shade and makes the massacre inadvisable. In that way you'll save the situation and your own reputation as well. Will you do that?"

"*Taib.*"

As the old man gave his consent, reluctantly and only half-convinced, there came the stuttering ram-or-——-you roar of a motorcycle from the direction of Jerusalem. It stopped before the gate and in a minute a dusty British corporal stood saluting in the door.

"Dispatch for Captain de Crespigny!" he announced, in the matter-of-fact voice of a postman delivering the mail.

"I'll take it," answered Grim.

CHAPTER IV

"I feel like Pontius Pilate!"

HAVE you ever had an official dispatch passed to you to read, marked "secret," that has been brought at sixty miles an hour by a grimy man on a motorcycle? It feels good, never mind what serious news it contains. Grim tore open the envelope, glanced at the single sheet and handed it to me; whereat I enjoyed all the sensations that attach themselves to unauthorized participation in events, all the thrills that come of reading tragic news—as if I were a spectator and not actor in a drama—and pride besides, because Cohen, of course, belonged to an inferior breed and might not read it.

"Any trouble on the way?" asked Grim.

"Nothing to speak of, sir. Fired at nine or ten times, but only one bullet through my tunic."

"Think you can get back all right?"

"Have a try, sir. Sixty mile an hour's a poor target. Gettin' dark too."

"Did you notice any signs of concerted action as you came along?"

"Can't say I did, sir. I was comin' that fast I didn't dare tike me eyes off the road. Them what fired at me was snipers."

Grim took the dispatch from me and handed it to Cohen. I had to recall deliberately that I liked Cohen. He read it in the manner of a dry-goods dealer opening the morning mail. What was worse, he read it aloud, destroying secrecy and ninety-nine per cent. of the Romance. What was the use of marking the thing "secret" in big black letters if it was to be treated like a newspaper, and in the presence, too, of the corporal who had risked his life to bring it? But the British are a strange race and Grim's way with some of their conventions was even more surprizing.

"'Jerusalem,'" read Aaron Cohen, "'is fairly well in hand.' I suppose they mean by that the Moslems have quit knifin' for twenty minutes to go an' say their prayers! 'Several Jews and Moslems have been killed and a considerable number of both sides wounded.' You'll notice there's nothin' about British officers an' Sikhs. They ain't a side; they're on top! 'All gates have been closed and a guard set on the ramparts.' That's to keep Jews from escapin' while the Moslems do the dirty work! 'There is no reliable news from Hebron and it is therefore assumed that all is well there.' Say, ain't that English for you! 'The present moment is not favorable for sending detachments of troops, small or otherwise, to outlying places and it is therefore hoped that you will tide over the emergency without assistance.' Hey! I'm going to remember that! That's a pippin! Next creditor that writes me for something on account, I'm going to answer 'the present moment is not favorable for sending remittances, small or otherwise, to out o' town dealers, an' it is therefore hoped—' Oh, that's a lallopolooser! 'Word from you by bearer would be welcome, with any particulars that you think important.' Can't read his signature—looks like a G and an X and three Ws and a twiggly mark. Calls himself staff-major. I call him a genius! That man 'ud be worth any firm's money!"

He passed the letter back to Grim.

"Goin' to answer it? Let me answer it! I bet you I'll bring the Sikhs here in motor-trucks in two hours! What this Administration needs most is a course in business correspondence. Let me give him some particulars that I think important! I'll tell him!"

Grim, signing himself as "acting in temporary absence of the governor," wrote a few lines in a hurry and showed them to Cohen and me before he sealed them up.

> "Nothing unmanageable here yet, but when available a machine gun might be advisable for demonstration purposes. Expect to be able to carry on meanwhile without assistance, but advise that a company of Sikhs be sent as soon as possible. James Schuyler Grim."

"You might be an out-o'-town drummer askin' the firm for samples!" was Cohen's comment on that. "What that firm needs is orders— 'Send hardware quick by express and men to demonstrate!'"

"That's all," said Grim, handing the corporal the envelope and the man saluted and was gone. Two minutes later the bark of his exhaust began echoing off the stone walls and in a minute more our last link with civilized force had vanished out of hearing.

THEN, as the galloping explosions died in the distance the Governorate servant came in with the news that sixteen men were waiting at the gate. Grim told him to admit them and we went into the long hall to await their coming, sitting on a bench at the end like three kings on a throne, Grim, Cohen and I, with Ali Baba standing like a lord high chancellor beside us.

They filed in one by one, mysterious and curious, peering this and that way in the deepening twilight, strangely heavy-footed in spite of a manner suggesting conspiracy, and not in the least at ease until Ali Baba spoke to them. I noticed that Grim was watching the old man narrowly; if a signal had passed I think he would have known it.

They were led by a giant—a bulky, bearded stalwart about forty years old, in a sheepskin coat that only half-concealed the heft of his shoulders. He wore a long knife in a sheath at his middle, but looked able to slay men, as Samson did, without it. The naked, hairy calf that showed for a moment through a slit in his saffron-colored smock was herculean with lumpy muscle, and he bowed to us with rather the air of a strong man favoring weaker brethren. But his smile—a streak of milk-white in the midst of glossy dark hair—was winning enough, for his brown eyes smiled too and were wide enough apart to look good-natured.

None of the rest was as tall as the first man, or as good-looking, although they were a magnificent gang and quite aware of it. They were used, those fellows, to the middle of the road and the deference the physically weaker pay to athletes who know their strength and value it. They seemed to own the earth they stood on.

There was a one-eyed man among them and one fellow much shorter than the rest, who made up for lack of inches by prodigious breadth and arms like a gorilla's, reaching nearly to his knees. Almost the last to enter I recognized our old friend Mahommed ben Hamza, grinning good-humoredly as ever, and swaggering with all the old "the world is mine oyster" manner that distinguished him at El-Kerak, when he held Grim's life and mine for a day or so in the hollow of his hand.

They were a strong-smelling company, but otherwise comforting to meet, since they were not to be enemies. There was a vague suggestion about them of a pack of hound-pups, ready to howl on a scent and tear their quarry in pieces, or to wag their tails and play; whichever might suit the huntsman's mood.

I dare say the lot of them weighed a ton and a half, and if you had boiled them down for fat you might have harvested a dozen pounds; but excepting that one characteristic of hard condition the only strong family resemblance that they all shared was a certain plastic serenity of forehead and breadth between the eyes.

"Show your respect to the gentlemen," Ali Baba ordered sternly, whereat they formed in double line across the hall and bowed with great dignity.

"Your father Ali Baba has a word to say to you all," announced Grim.

"We listen when he speaks," said the big man.

"Go on, Ali Baba."

"The Jews are not to die tonight. Jimgrim has spoken. Between us and Jimgrim is a covenant of blood. See ye to it that our honor is whole in this matter."

"Then the fire-gift? What of that?" asked the giant.

"Use ye the fire-gift as before. Use it this night. I come too, for Jimgrim has done me honor and set me free. But let it be known that it is not written for tonight. Perhaps tomorrow night, but not tonight by any means may Jews be killed."

There was a murmur of half-rebellion along both ranks, and an exchange of quick glances.

"Jimgrim is our brother," said the big man, "but who will listen now? They will smite us in the teeth and throw stones if we say now that what we said before was false! Moreover, they will draw their swords in spite of us."

I rather expected Grim would join in the argument at that point, but nothing of the kind.

"This is your gang, Ali Baba," was all he said, and sat well back, rather ostentatiously at ease. And the old man took the cue from him.

Never have I seen such fury—such sudden change from patriarchal dignity to blazing wrath; nor ever more surprizing meekness in the face of it. The old man raised both clenched fists and the very hairs of his beard seemed to stand apart and stiffen with the intensity of his frenzy.

"Shall I curse my sons?" he screamed. "Are these the men I got—the children of my loins that sneer in my face like idiots and answer Nay to my Yea? Is my old age a mockery that sixteen louts should dare know better than I? Leave me! I will marry wives and God will give me other sons! I will find me better sons in the *suk!* * Is it not enough to be jailed by an infidel for the sake of a heretic Jew, that my own sons must come and mock my face and my gray hairs? Truly is Allah great and his judgment past discerning! All these years have I nurtured snakes, believing I was blessed in them. And so at last Allah clears my old eyes and shows me the poison in their teeth! Go! Go! I am a childless man! Better the dogs of the street than sons who mock their father! Go, I order you!"

But they did not go. Nor did they take his terrific reproof other than abjectly. They closed up and fawned on him, more than ever like hound-pups, looking more enormous than ever because of his age and comparative frailty—begging, imploring, coaxing him, calling him respectful names, making him promises that would have made Aladdin's eyes start, even after his experience with the wondrous lamp. Finally the biggest of them put their arms about him and bore him off in the midst of the sixteen, they still fawning and he protesting.

"So that settles that," said Grim, getting off the bench.

"Call that a settlement?" asked Cohen. "All you've done, as far as I can see, is to turn a lot of knifers loose on the town and nothin' gained but their own admission that they can't do a thing! They'll talk that old rooster over as soon as they get outside. Here it is dark already and a pogrom slated for tonight! Seems to me you're— Say what do you figure you've done, anyway?"

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*Market-place.

But Grim is not given to explaining things much; he told me more than once he has a notion that discussing half-formed plans "lets off the pressure and drowns the spark." He looked at Cohen critically, but with that gleam of tolerant amusement that always takes the sting out of a remark:

"We've still got Aaron Cohen to fall back on," he answered quietly. "I'll bet with you, Aaron—my silver watch against your gold one that there won't be a throat cut in Hebron as long as you play the game!"

"Me? What game? Call this a game? Here, take the watch! I'll have no use for it this time tomorrow!"

"I'll trade with you. There, take mine. Now I'll bet with you the other way about. My gold watch against your silver one that you daren't play my game and pull this fat out of the fire!"

"May as well play your game as any man's!" laughed Cohen. "Are you thinkin' of issuing rain checks in case the knifing's put off till tomorrow?"

"I've offered to bet you you daren't."

"Daren't what?"

"Play my game."

"Blind? All right, it's a bet! You show me the thing I daren't do!"

"I'll try!" Grim answered. "But I'd take ten cents for my option on your watch!"

De Crespigny and Jones came in together just then, laughing about some incident in the city and the servant began laying the table for dinner with a brave effort to seem cheerful too, as if he hoped we might live to eat it. He was a wizened old city Arab, deeply pitted with smallpox marks, who had seen his share of trouble in Hebron and retained little except poverty and a huge capacity to doubt.

"The city's quiet," announced de Crespigny, as we started on the soup. "Either they're waiting for the men on the camels to bring back a report, or they've made up their minds to cut loose at midnight. There's no knowing which. I acted Dutch uncle to the head-men in the *mejliss* hall."

"How old was the youngest of them?" I asked him.

"Lord knows. Why? What difference does his age make? I told them they are responsible for good order in the city and that I'll hold their noses to it. The Jews made the most fuss; they're naturally scared. They demanded a curfew rule—everybody to be within doors after eight o'clock."

"Did you agree to that?" Grim asked—a shade sharply it seemed to me. He left off eating soup and waited for the answer.

"Didn't dare. Couldn't enforce it with ten policemen. So I pretended to give the idea a minute's consideration and then told 'em the head-men might make any ruling they liked and that at the first sign of disorder the head-men will be the ones who'll catch it! On top of that I told 'em I've decided not to send for troops as long as they behave themselves; thought that might explain away the fact that we can't get troops!"

"Good boy!" said Grim.

"I feel like Pontius Pilate!" laughed de Crespigny.

"He was better off; he had about a hundred men," said Jones. "All the same, you've done what he did. I was all through the city. You've jolly well got P. Pilate Esquire looking like a silver-plater cantering behind the crowd at the end of a season."

"Thanks!"

"What I mean is, I think you've kept on top. You were so jolly cool they think you've got a red ace up your sleeve."

"I'm hoping Grim has," said de Crespigny.

"Sure—I've got Cohen," answered Grim.

Cohen laid his spoon down and looked about him.

"Red ace? Me? Up anybody's sleeve? Say, quit your kiddin'!"

"All right. You're to do the kidding from now on."

"Kid myself, I suppose? Kid myself my stummik don't feel creepy each time there's a new noise in the street!"

"Yes, kid yourself. You're going to be an Arab after dinner."

"Well, give me a long knife then! Maybe I'll wave it an' preach a holy war an' lead all the Arabs in rings around the country until they get sore feet an' die o' homesickness? That's a better idea than any I've heard yet."

"You've got to lead Jews, not Arabs," Grim answered.

"Me? In this place? It can't be done. They're all Orthodox here. There isn't one of 'em would listen to me."

"We'll see," Grim answered and he would not say another word on the subject all through dinner.

It was not an easy meal. There were constant interruptions by mysterious men from the city who sought word with de Crespigny. Most of them were men who feared for their property in case of an outbreak of violence—for the Moslems loot pretty indiscriminately when the game begins, and he who has an enemy does well to watch him. But two or three of them were on the official list of spies and their reports were not reassuring.

However, we reached the stage of nuts and port wine without having been fired at through the window, which was something, and although there was an atmosphere of overhanging danger, not lessened by the smoky oil lamps and the shadows they cast on the wall, or by the dead silence of the street outside, broken only at intervals by the cough of the solitary sentry I, for one, did not feel like a doomed man; and I suspected Cohen of feeling less afraid than he pretended. I think he was actually more nervous about what Grim had in store for him than creepy about Arab knives.

AFTER dinner the house was ransacked for Arab garments that would fit him, and in half an hour he was trigged out well enough to deceive any one. The Jewish are not unlike Arab features, in the dark especially, and there was less risk of his being detected than of my making some bad break that would give the three of us away; although by that time under Grim's tuition I had learned how to act an Arab part pretty well, provided I held my tongue.

Cohen could talk Arabic as easily as English, being a linguist like most Jews, as against my mere beginner's efforts. But Grim would not hear of leaving me behind. I am convinced that over and over again if he had left me out of things he could have accomplished his purpose more easily, but he has a sort of showman instinct under his mask of indifference to side-issues, coupled to a most extravagant devotion to his friends.

I should say that his weakest point is that. He is inclined to run absurd risks to do a friend a favor, and takes a child's delight in springing a weird surprize on you, often for his purpose treating regulations and such encumbrances as if they never existed. And his friends are strictly of his own choosing. Nationality, creed, social standing, even morality, mean nothing to him when it comes to likes and dislikes, so that you often find yourself in strange company if you are lucky enough to stumble into his astonishing circle, as I did.

He and Cohen and I left the house by the front door— I with strict instructions to keep silent and much occupied with the difficulty of walking like a native. We went past the jail, where the man on duty did not recognize us, for he challenged gruffly and cautioned us to go home; then straight on down the empty street toward the city, where hardly a light hinted that more than twenty thousand people dwelt.

Parts of the ancient wall are standing, but there are no gates left and it was only as the street grew narrower and crooked that we knew we were within. There was no moon so, although the purple sky was powdered with blazing jewels, the shadows were black as pitch and it was more by watching the roof-line than the pavement that we found our way.

Now and then we passed under tunnels where ancient houses with six-foot-thick walls were built over the street; but those were generally lighted by dim oil lamps that flickered wanly, suggesting stealthy movements in the dark ten feet away.

It was clean enough underfoot, for those two boys had set at naught the Palestinian obsession for saving water that is as old as the tanks they preserve the rain in; but as the camel-load-wide street shut in on us the smells of ancientry awoke, until we came to the ghetto and a stench like rotting fish put all other sensations for the moment out of mind.

You can get a suggestion of the same smell in New York in the small streets where the immigrants live awhile before they begin to absorb America.

There an iron lamp hung on a bracket and shed gold on the flanks and floor of a plain stone arch. There had been a great gate, for the hinges were there, but the gate was gone. Under the arch, beyond the farthest rays of lamplight was the night in its own home, blacker than the gloom of graveyards. There was not a sound or a suggestion of anything but mother-night, that you might lean against.

Grim led the way in. It felt like groping your way forward into a trap, for in spite of the insufferable silence—or because of it—there was a sensation after the first few yards of being watched by eyes you could not see and waited for by enemies who held their breath.

Twenty yards down a passage so narrow that you could touch both sides at once without fully extending your arms Grim stopped and listened, and it was so dark that Cohen and I cannoned into him. Little by little then, you became aware of infinitely tiny dots of lights, where doors and shutters did not quite fit and once or twice of a footfall about as noisy as a cat's. There was teeming life behind the scenes, as awake and watchful as the jungle creatures that wander between the thickets when men go by.

Suddenly Grim began to call aloud in Hebrew, sending the mellow, rounded vowels booming along between the walls, but getting no response except the echo of his own voice. Three times he repeated what sounded like the same words and then turned back.

"Quick! Out of this! An Arab isn't safe here!"

By comparison the gloom of the street looked like daylight. We made for it like small boys afraid of graveyard ghosts.

"What did you say to them?" I asked and Cohen snickered.

"A verse from the Psalms in the original—'Come, behold the works of the Lord. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God. . . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.' "

"Now who's kiddin' himself?" asked Cohen. "You think they wouldn't sooner know the Sikhs were coming?"

"D'you know the history of your own people?" Grim answered. "There isn't a man in that ghetto who hasn't a sharp weapon of some kind. If they thought the Sikhs were on the way they'd very likely start something for the Sikhs to finish. That's crowd psychology. Get a number of people all in one place, hating one thing or afraid of one thing and any fool can stampede them into violence. Jews are fighters; don't forget it; if they weren't they'd have been exterminated long ago. If the Jews start anything tonight we're done for. That voice in the dark may make them think. Come on."

"Where are we going now?"

"To the Haram."

"Gee!"

There was no need to explain to Cohen what that meant and the deadly danger of it. Beneath the mosque in the Haram is the cave of Machpelah in which Abraham's bones are said to lie. The Arabs claim descent from Abraham in the line of Ishmael and Esau, and dwell lingeringly on the story of how both men lost their birthright, as they hold, unfairly; so now that they have the tables turned and own the tomb of the common ancestor, they take delight in keeping out the descendants of Jacob, and the death of a Jew caught in that place would be swift. Jews and other "infidels" with rare exceptions are allowed as far as the seventh step leading upward from the street, but not one inch nearer.

"Are we going inside?" asked Cohen.

"May as well."

"You've got your nerve!"

"We'll be safe if you've got yours."

Cohen did not answer and I would have given a lot to know just what was going on in his mind. If the prospect of entering that mosque thrilled me it must have meant vastly more to him, however broad his disrespect and loose his faith might be; for not a Jew had stood within stone-throw of the tomb of Abraham for nearly two thousand years, and all the Jews of the world, Orthodox or not, look back through the mists of time to Abraham at least as thoughtfully as does New England to the Pilgrim Fathers.

If he regarded Abraham as myth it was none the less an adventure to tread where no Jew had dared show himself for nineteen centuries; but I don't think he did, for you need not scratch the most free-thinking Jew particularly deep before you find a pride of ancestry as stiff as any man's. Cohen was not one of those "international" firebrands that offend by denying race as well as creed, but a mighty decent fellow as the sequel showed.

Grim knew the way through the dark streets as a fox knows the rabbit-runs, and led without a moment's hesitation. His point of view was not so puzzling as Cohen's; he was like a knife that goes straight to the heart of things, as unconscious of resistance as a blade that is fine enough to slip between what heavier tools must press against and break.

Making our way continually southward, we threaded the quarter of the glass-blowers and the quarter of the water-skin makers, past endless shuttered stalls where lamplight filtered dimly through the cracks in proof that the city was not asleep.

There was very little sound, but an atmosphere of tense expectancy. A few men were abroad, but they avoided us, slinking into shadows; for it is not wise to be recognized before the looting starts, lest an enemy denounce you afterwards.

The wise—and all Hebron prides itself on wisdom in affairs of lawlessness—were indoors, waiting. You felt as if the city held its breath.

When we drew near the Haram at last there was more life in evidence. It began with the street dogs that always leave their miserable offal-hunting to slink and be curious around the circle of men's doings. We had to kick them out of the way and were well saluted for our pains so that our arrival on the scene was hardly surreptitious.

Over the south entrance of the Haram a great iron lantern burned, and we could see the wall beyond it, of enormous, drafted, smooth-hewn blocks as old as history. Men were leaning against it and standing in groups, some of them holding lanterns and every one armed. The men of Hebron, who pride themselves on fierceness, are at pains to look fierce when violence is cooking and the Arab costume lends itself to that. I think Cohen shuddered and I know I did. Grim led straight on, as if he owed no explanation to the guardians of the place and did not expect to be called upon to give any.

But they stopped us at the entrance, an arch no wider than to admit two men abreast, and, because Grim was leading, hands that were neither too respectful nor overgentle thrust him back, and fierce, excited faces were thrust close to his.

"Allah! Where are you coming? Who are you?"

"Heaven preserve you, brothers! Mahommed Hadad and two friends," Grim answered.

"What do you want?"

"To see the fire-gift."

"Whence do you come?"

"From Beersheba, where all men tell of the great happenings in El-Kalil."

"Ye come to spy on us!"

"Allah forbid!"

"Then to steal! Beersheba is a rain-washed bone; ye come to help loot El-Kalil and afterwards leave us to bear the blame for it!"

"*Shu halalk?** We be honest men. In the name of the Merciful, my brothers, we seek admittance."

"Are there Jews with you?"

"That is a strange jest! Who would bring a Jew to this place?"

"Nevertheless, let us see the others."

There were long, keen knives in their girdles. As Cohen and I raised our faces to be looked at we offered our throats temptingly and the goose-flesh rose all down my arms and thighs. Only a Jew can guess what Cohen felt; but a Jew looks exactly like an Arab when his face is framed in the *kafiyi*. Neither of us spoke. I stepped forward after Grim, trying to look as if I knew my rights in the matter, and Cohen followed me. In another second we were past the guard and mounting steps up which sudden death is the penalty for trespass.

CHAPTER V

"The mummery they call the fire-gift."

WHAT with darkness and the crowd and the fact that every one was busy with his own excitement we were safe enough until we reached the mosque door. The Haram is a big place with all manner of buildings opening off it—dwellings for dervishes for instance, a place for people known as saints and a home for the guardians, who live separate from the saints and are said to have a different sort of morals altogether. The court was packed with men among whom we had to thread our way, and the steps leading up to the mosque were like a grandstand at a horse-race with barely foot-room left for one man at a time up the middle.

Directness seemed to be Grim's key. That as a fact is oftenest the one safe means of doing the forbidden thing. Your deferent, too cautious man is stopped and questioned, while the impudent fellow gets by and is gone before suspicion lights on him.

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*What talk is this?

But at the top of the steps we were met by the Sheikh of the mosque, who had eyes that could cut through the dark and a nose begotten out of criticism by mistrust; a lean, long-bearded man so steeped in sanctity and so alert for the least suspicion of a challenge to it that I don't believe a mouse could have got by uninvestigated. You could guess what he was the moment his eye fell on you and even by the dim light cast by an iron lantern on a chain above him his cold stare gave me the creeps.

It was baleful and made more so because he wore a turban in place of the usual Arab head-dress that frames and in that way modifies the harshness of a man's face. His beard accentuated rather than softened the pugnacious angle of his jaw, and if I am any judge of a man's temper his was like nitroglycerin, swift to get off the mark and to destroy.

But explosives, too, are forbidden things. If you mean to handle them the simplest way is best. Grim walked straight up to him.

"*Allah ybarik fik!** I bring news," he announced.

"Every alley-thief brings tales tonight!" the other answered. "Who are you? And who are these?"

"I bring word from Seyyid Omar, the Sheikh of the Dome of the Rock of El-Kudz."

"Allah! At this time?"

"What does necessity know of time? How many ears have you?"

It was pretty obvious that there were thirty pairs of ears straining to catch the conversation.

"You may follow me alone then."

But Grim knew better than to leave us two on the steps at the mercy of questioners. At the outer gate he had said we were from Beersheba in order to avoid the honor of an escort to the Sheikh. Now he claimed herald's honors for all three of us, for the same purpose of avoiding close attention.

"Three bore the news, not one," he answered.

"One is enough to tell it. I have not three sets of ears," snapped the Sheikh.

"Then you wish me to leave these two outside to gossip with the crowd?"

"Allah! What sort of discreet ones has Seyyid Omar chosen! Let them follow then."

So we fell in line behind him and passed through the curtains hung to shield from infidel eyes an interior that in the judgment of many Moslems is nearly as sacred as the shrine at Mecca.

Like so many of the Moslem sacred places it was once a church, built by the crusaders on the site of earlier splendor that the Romans wrecked—a lordly building, the lower courses of whose walls are all of ten-ton stones—a place laid out with true eye for proportion by men who had no doubt of what they did. For that has always been known as the veritable tomb of Abraham; no one has ever doubted it until these latter days of too much unbelief.

The higher critics will deny one of these days that Grant's body was ever buried in Grant's Tomb; but the lower critics, who are not amused by proof that twice two isn't four, will read of Grant and go and see and be convinced.

> "And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron: and Abraham weighed unto Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant. And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees which were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of the city.
>
> "And after this Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. . . . Then Abraham died in a good old age and his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; the field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife."

You don't have to believe that straightforward account, of course, if you don't want to. And if you care to imagine that the Jews and Arabs, who set so much store by Abraham, would ever have forgotten the exact site of his burial-place, so that later arrivals on the scene could not identify it, imagination, even of that sort, does not have to be assessed for income tax. Go to it.

But you can't pass through those curtains into the mosque and not believe. Not more than twenty non-Moslems in a thousand years have been in there, and each has told the same tale of calm conviction afterward. I heard Cohen catch his breath.

The whole place was full of men, who

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*God preserve you.

squatted on the priceless rugs that cover every inch of a floor larger than some cathedrals boast. We passed among them down the center aisle between two cenotaphs that mark the graves of Isaac and Rebecca; for they and Jacob and his wife as well, are buried in the same cave under the mosque floor. But the Sheikh did not pause there; there were too many who might listen, and the dim light from lamps that hung on chains shone in their eyes as they watched us, and on the hilts of swords, so that we seemed to be trespassing where ghouls brewed wrath.

At the north end the Sheikh led into an octagonal-shaped chapel, with the cenotaphs of Abraham and Sarah draped with green and crimson in the midst; and why that place was deserted just at that time was a mystery, for there was no barrier to exclude any one. Not a soul moved in there; none whispered in the shadows. The Sheikh and we three squatted down on a Turkoman rug above Abraham's bones and faced one another unlistened to, unseen.

"What now?" said the Sheikh. "Be quick with your message. This is no time for gossip. I have my responsibilities."

As Cohen had remarked, Grim had his nerve with him. Face to face with that explosive-minded Sheikh he came straight to the point. I have seen lion-tamers act the same way; they don't pretty-pussy the beast through the bars, but go right in and seize the upper hand.

"Seyyed Omar of El-Kudz,* Sheikh of the Dome of the Rock, demands to know why you dare permit this place to be polluted by the mummery they call the fire-gift! All the City is talking of it."

"Allah! Am I dreaming? Who are you that dare speak such insolence to me?"

"Seyyed Omar's messenger."

"Show me a writing from him."

Grim shook his head and sneered.

"It is from you that there must be a writing. I come with two witnesses to hear me ask the question and to prove that I report your answer truly. Shall I ask a second time?"

THE Sheikh glared back and bit his beard, tortured I thought, between indignation and fear. I guessed Grim was on pretty safe ground now, for he knew Sheikh Seyyed Omar of El-Kudz intimately, and to my knowledge had done him a greater service than could ever be lightly overlooked; he was truly delivering a message from him for aught I knew; more improbable things have happened. True message or not, he waited with the air of a man who represents high authority.

"What business is it of Seyyed Omar's? Let him mind his own mosque!"

"It is his judgment," Grim answered, "that this place is lapsing into disrepute. If that is true it is his duty to accuse you. If the fault is not yours, although the charge is true, it is his purpose to help you remedy the matter."

"It is not my fault."

"But the charge is true?"

"Allah pity us, it is true! But how can Seyyed Omar help—a fat man with both hands full of troubles of his own?"

"He has sent us three."

"If you were three angels with the trumpet of Gabriel I fail to see how you could set matters straight. There are seventeen thieves of El-Kalil who have tricked me and won the upper hand. May the curse of the Most High break their bones forever!"

"Who are they?"

"Ali Baba ben Hamza and his brood of rascals."

"I have heard of them. Such ignorant men can surely never get the better of us."

"They have it! Listen. That old dog Ali Baba ben Hamza came to me and said: 'I am old and my sins weigh heavy on me. I saw a vision in the night. A spirit appeared to me and said I must pray all night at the tomb of Abraham, I and my sixteen sons, together with none watching. So I may obtain mercy and my sons shall have new hearts.' That was fair speaking, was it not? Who am I that I should stand between a man and Allah's mercy? But they are thieves, those seventeen, and the charge of this mosque is mine; so I would not lock them in the place alone, as they desired. I and another entered with them on a certain night and locked the door."

"Leaving no guard outside?" asked Grim.

"Leaving seven men outside, whose orders were to stay awake. But they slept. When the door was locked those seventeen devils took me and the man who was with me, and laid cloths over our faces, having first saturated the cloths with a drug they had stolen from the hospital. I know that, because the foreign doctor made complaint afterwards that his drugs had been stolen. So I and the man who was with me also slept, I do not know how long. When we awoke we were deathly sick and vomited."

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*Jerusalem.

"Where were the seventeen thieves by that time?" Grim asked him, for the Sheikh seemed too disturbed by the memory to go on with the tale.

"They were here, where we sit now. But I did not go in to them at once. They had laid me and the man who was with me in the northern porch not far from the cenotaphs of Jacob and his wife, and to reach them I had to pass by the entrance to the cave that has been sealed up these eight hundred years. Then I made a terrible discovery. Allah! But my eyes popped out of my head with unbelief! Yet it was so. The masonry had been broken through! They had been down into the tomb of Abraham!"

"Did you go and see what they had done down there?" Grim asked.

"*Shi biwakkif!** Allah! I did not dare! Eight hundred years ago a Turkish prince defied the guardians of the mosque and entered the tomb alone. He came groping his way out with eyesight gone, and could never tell what befell him, for his speech was also taken. After that the opening was sealed. Nay, I did not dare go. Who knows what spirits dwell in that great cave? But when my fear was a little overcome and wrath succeeded it I came in here to see what manner of curse had fallen on those seventeen men. They were breathing fire! As I sit here and Allah is my witness, they were breathing flame! It shot forth from their mouths as I stood and watched them!"

"And the man who was with you? What did he do all this time?"

"He came and stood beside me and saw all that I saw and bore witness. I took courage then, having another with me, and together we approached Ali Baba, who sat where you sit, and I demanded what it all might mean. The old thief—the old trespasser—the old —— rake answered that while he and his sons prayed there came an angel, who touched with his fingers the masonry that closed the entrance to the cave, so that it fell."

"How did he account for your not seeing this?" asked Grim.

"He said that, the vision not being intended for me, the presence of the angel overpowered me and the man who was with me and we swooned. I accused him of having drugged us, but he answered that we must have dreamed that. The dog of a thief!"

"Well, go on. What next?"

"He said that the angel beckoned and he and his sixteen rascals followed into the tomb of Abraham, where a spirit came and breathed on them and they all received the gift of fire. In proof of it every one of the sixteen eggs of Satan belched fire from his mouth as the father of thieving spoke.

"You should have summoned your seven men, and have sent them for others, and have had Ali Baba and his thieves jailed for sacrilege," said Grim.

"But I tell you the seven men slept! I opened the door and shouted for them, but none came; and Ali Baba and his sixteen dogs pushed past me through the door and were gone! So after we had locked the door again I and the other man who was with me took counsel together and I was for sending for the Governor of Hebron; but he said that would be to make a public scandal, which it were well to avoid.

"He said that the Moslems of Hebron would not be pleased with us if it were known that we had let ourselves be tricked in such a matter and that they would be yet less pleased with us if we should appeal to foreigners. Moreover, he confessed himself afraid. He said that after all the story of the angel might be true and that if we denied it there might be a tumult. There are many wild fools in El-Kalil!"

"But you, not he, are the Sheikh of the mosque," said Grim.

"Truly. Yet he refused to follow the course I favored. He vowed that he would tell what he had seen with his own eyes and no more: to wit, the broken masonry and seventeen men all breathing fire in this place where we sit. He insisted that the wisest course for both of us would be to say nothing and to wait and see what Ali Baba and his sons might have to say first; to that course he was willing to agree.

"There is wisdom in silence; so he and I carried in cement and replaced the broken masonry with great care, agreeing to tell no word of it to any man until circumstances should reveal to us the right course. And the day following he ran away, Allah knows whither; so I am all alone to bear the brunt of this matter. Allah send a poor man wisdom that I may avoid disgrace!"

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*Who could think of such a thing?

"Well—what account has Ali Baba given of it?"

"Have you not heard? He and his brood go belching —— fire through the streets, saying they went into the cave and have a gift of prophecy. When men came to see the entrance of the cave and found it sealed up that old father of lies declared that one angel had broken the masonry, and afterwards another came and closed it. They could see that the cement was fresh and the stones slightly disarranged and that convinced them! Do you realize my predicament? My choice lay between confession that I had not guarded the cave faithfully, or saying nothing. I have said nothing. I continue to say nothing. Let Allah speak, or the spirit of Abraham, for I am dumb!"

"I find that you have been unwise," said Grim after a minute's pause; and for half a minute after that the Sheikh battled with his own priestly pride. For many and many a year he had been fault-finder-in-chief in Hebron, and the licensed critic of others seldom suffers judgment doucely. However, he swallowed the verdict, Grim watching him as if a chemical experiment were taking place in a test-tube.

"But not unfaithful," Grim added, when the right second seemed to have come to drop that new ingredient into the mixture of emotions.

The Sheikh's eyes that had been blazing grew as grateful as a dog's.

"Moreover, I find that the wisdom of your subsequent silence offsets the former foolishness and I shall say so to Seyyed Omar when I go back to El-Kudz."

"*Istarfrallah!*"*

"In silence there is dignity, and out of dignity may come deliverance," said Grim.

"*Inshallah!*"†

"Those seventeen thieves are not men of keen intellect, are they?" Grim asked him suddenly.

"Allah! They are rogues with the brains of foxes—no better and no less."

"How should they have thought of such a scheme as this?"

"*Shi ajib.* (It is a strange thing.) Who can fathom it?"

"There must be a brain behind them."

"Perhaps the brain of Satan! Who knows?"

"Think!" said Grim. "Is there any foreigner in Hebron who might have put them up to it?"

"I know of none."

"Has there been no stranger here, who perhaps took a particular interest in the entrance to the cave?"

"Ah! There was one, yes—about a month ago. But he was a dervish out of Egypt—a mere fanatic—a fool who did tricks with coins and eggs to amuse folk and begged his living."

"Where is he now?" asked Grim.

"They say he lives in a cave near Abraham's Oak."

"You say a mere mountebank?"

"No better."

Grim proceeded to dismiss that subject as beneath consideration. If I had dared air my Arabic I would have urged him to follow it up further and by the look in Cohen's eye he felt the same about it; but the most that either of us dared do was to sit still and call as little attention to ourselves as possible. Nothing but the fact that Grim had forced the Sheikh on the defensive from the start was preserving us from being questioned in a way that would have exposed me certainly, and Cohen probably.

"And this fire-gift—they are going to display it now?" asked Grim, as if he did not know.

"Aye, now. And I, who am Sheikh of this mosque, must eat humility and watch them. Truly are the ways of Allah past discerning. Verily dust is dust."

"Amen!" said Grim. "But did you never see a vision? May the Sheikh of a mosque such as this not talk with spirits now and then?"

The Sheikh stared back at him with his jaw down. You could have put anything into his mouth that you cared to and he wouldn't have known it; the suggestion had hit home.

"If seventeen thieves can see an angel," Grim went on, as if propounding a conundrum, "how many can the Sheikh of this mosque see?"

"But the fire-gift? These men show a miracle. How to answer that?"

"With another."

"But—but—I am no mountebank. I can do no tricks with fire."

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*Literally: I beg God's pardon, viz., for my shortcomings; i. e., I am unworthy of praise.

†If God wills.

"New tricks would do no good without a prophecy," said Grim. "In a matter of prophecy, whose word would be listened to, yours or theirs?"

"*Inshallah*, mine!"

"And which is wiser; to confound your adversary with his own arguments, or yours?"

"With his. Surely with his, for then he has no retort."

"So then—these seventeen thieves say that the fire-gift came out of the tomb of Abraham. If you were to say that because they are thieves the fire-gift must return again; if you were to say that an angel had appeared to you and told you that, would not all Hebron listen?"

"It might be. But Ali Baba and his sixteen sons have preached a killing of the Jews. The swords of El-Kalil are sharpened. They are ready to begin."

"Yes, and if they do begin all Hebron will say afterwards that the fire-gift and the prophecy were true. Ali Baba will be reckoned a true prophet and you will have a competitor on your hands."

"Truly."

"Therefore the massacre must not begin. Therefore you must stand up in the mosque now, and say you have seen a vision."

"But if I tell them there must be no massacre they will hurry all the faster to begin it; for that is the way of the men of El-Kalil."

"Not if you promise the chance of a greater miracle."

"But what then? What shall I promise?"

"Say that the angel said to you—'these seventeen men are thieves and stole the fire-gift. Therefore there is a condition made. Not one Jew must be slain until the Jews shall have their chance to bring the fire-gift back. If they do bring it back, well; they are reprieved. They have one day and night in which to do it, and if a Jew is slain meanwhile there will be a vengeance on El-Kalil such as never yet befell—a vengeance of wrath and death and ruin. But if the Jews shall fail to bring it back, let them take the consequences!'"

"These are dark words," said the Sheikh.

"They are wise words."

"*Inshallah*, the plan can do no harm. If the Jews can make no miracle, at least I shall have taken something of the influence away from Ali Baba. This massacre is not good; delay might prevent it and avoid the punishment the British would mete out afterwards. Good. I will stand in the mosque and say I have seen a vision!"

"Better do it now," said Grim. "It's getting late."

"Come ye, and sit in the mosque then, and listen!"

CHAPTER VI

Fortune favors the man who favors fortune.

VIEWED in the light of what subsequently happened it seems possible that Grim's whole plan might have ended in disaster, if at that critical moment circumstances out of his control had not shaped themselves to aid him. But after a deal of blundering and being blundered up and down the world's by-ways I have learned and know by heart now these two fundamentals: there is nothing so unprofitable as to speculate in terms of "might have been;" and fortune favors the man who favors fortune.

That last sounds like heresy, or one of those Delphic deliveries that can be read in any of a dozen ways. Well, so it is and so it can be. All accepted doctrine was heresy at some time; and since no two men are quite alike, no two interpretations match exactly. If you call fortune "luck," luck is a chancy entity, and you will govern yourself and be governed accordingly.

I have heard of Washington and Lincoln both described as lucky, yet take leave to doubt that either of them gave a fig for luck. Both men, according to my reading of events, were fortunate. Fortune is fair and absolute and kind and generous. They favored her and so she favored them. In all the intimate and various relations that I had with Grim he never once referred to luck in terms of envy or esteem, but very often did describe himself as fortunate. Luck was the other fellow's talisman—the enemy's; fortune his.

When luck came his way he laughed and mistrusted it. On the other hand, when fortune met him in the way he seemed to know the lady at the first glance, which is a rather rare advantage and accounts, I suspect, for some men being senators while others clean the streets.

So, as the old tale craftsmen used to phrase it in the days when men thought more and squandered less, it fortuned that those camel-men returned from Jerusalem while we were entering the Mosque of Abraham. They went first to the Governorate and it fortuned that de Crespigny advised them to keep the camels until morning for their better convenience in spreading the news. So they lost no time; and being Hebron men with an inborn understanding of the city's ways, they came straight to the Haram where they felt sure in a time of excitement of finding the greatest possible number of men assembled in one place.

They gave their news to the crowd outside and entered the mosque by the south door exactly at the moment when the Sheikh at the opposite end turned into the center aisle with his mind made up to ascend the pulpit and tell his story of having seen a vision.

So he waited until they had done unburdening themselves of tidings to the swarm that closed around them. An Arab would rather have news to tell than a bellyful, and he likes his meal at that; so the two men made quite a ceremony of it, neither of them feeling inconvenienced or disappointed by being the center of attention. You could hear every word as they made the most of brief importance; and they were not unconscious of the obligation they owed to be accurate, since it was no small honor to have been selected to be witnesses of grave events.

"The story of a massacre by Jews is not true. There has been fighting. The Jews started it by insulting Moslems. A few were killed. Many hundred of both sides have been wounded. But the troops are now in control. There are barriers across the streets. The city gates are shut. We saw the administrator and he assigned an officer to show us all we cared to see. The Moslem holy places are intact and guarded by British troops.

"We asked the administrator whether troops would be sent to Hebron and he said no, there was no need; but we think that is because there are no troops that can be spared. He said there are plenty of troops, but we did not believe him; there are enough to hold the city* quiet but no more. It is our belief that there is no further danger of the Jews massacring Moslems in Jerusalem. Moreover, that administrator is a man to be reckoned with, with whose wrath it is not wisdom to take chances."

Grim began whispering to the Sheikh, who was stroking that sacerdotal beard of his in a conflict of emotions. It was a serious enough crisis in his affairs, for if he should give the wrong advice or make the unacceptable statement at that moment it was likely his own influence would be gone forever, and possibly the salaried position with it. It was by Grim's urging that he mounted the ancient pulpit—a marvel of a thing, made of Cedar of Lebanon for a Christian bishop in crusader times.

We three squatted in darkness by the wall and watched him. I thought Grim looked worried. The worst kind of fool on earth and the likeliest to make irreparable blunders is the man who is thinking of his own position first, as that Sheikh was undoubtedly. He stood stroking his beard, sharp-eyed and hook-nosed as an eagle, peering this and that way into all the shadows until the crowd became aware of him and spread itself to squat down on the mats to listen to him.

There is a peculiar democracy about the Moslem faith. Their whole law is religious, and they recognize no other legislation if they can help it. Once let him convince them that a given course is indicated in the Koran and any one can do almost as he likes with them. Any one can get a hearing; but they usually concede to their appointed officials the right to speak first, after which they are ready to argue endlessly, so that the first speaker does well to be primed with something solid that can stand the devastating discussion which is sure to follow.

The Sheikh was an old hand at making an impression. He let the silence settle down and grow intense before he spoke and then began acridly with an accusation.

"Ye listen to this and that man and the latest comer has your ear. The wind brings dust and ye call that news. A camel coughs in the *suk*, and ye say a prophet speaks. The breath of your mouthings fills the air like bad smells from a dung-heap, and ye call that wisdom. Ye pray, and to what end? That your vain imaginings may take form. Ye ask Allah, the all-wise, to change the universe to suit your foolishness, imagining that fools are competent to give advice to the Creator. It is written that the fool shall rue his folly, and the headstrong man shall dread the day of reckoning!"

He had their attention pretty thoroughly by that time, for nothing takes hold of the mind of a crowd so quickly as a string of platitudes, especially when they sting. Flattery is the weapon for the demagogue who seeks to stir a crowd to action; if he would rather hold them and win delay, a dozen acid generalities about their sins work wonders. But those are rules that all the mob-leaders understand.

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*The Arabs call Jerusalem El-Kudz, meaning The City.

"While ye looked for wisdom in the cesspools," he went on scornfully, "I turned to the Book. And while I read and prayed there came an angel and I saw a vision—here in this place where the footstep of the Prophet is imprinted in the stone on which he stood. Here above the tomb of Abraham I saw a true vision!"

There was silence for a moment in which you could hear one man cracking the joints of his toes nervously. Then a voice cried out that Allah is all-powerful, and one after another repeated it until they were all chanting the first principles of Moslem faith, whose repetition seems to prepare them to believe anything—do anything—submit to anything.

"God is God. There is no God but God. Mahommed is his prophet."

The great roof hummed with the chant for about two minutes, until it suddenly occurred to them that they had not heard the details of the vision yet, and they ceased as suddenly as the frogs cease piping when a stone is thrown into the pond.

"The angel who appeared to me was angry. I was afraid and my bones shook," the man in the pulpit snarled; for he was one of those who take religion without sugar and grow nasal as they speak of sacred things. "He told me that the fire that came forth from the tomb of Abraham is in the hands of thieves, who took it in order to stir strife against the Jews. Because they are thieves," said he, "they are unfit to return it; yet unless it be returned there will be a judgment on El-Kalil. So I laid my forehead on the floor and prayed to know by whose hand that fire may be returned, that the city may be saved from judgment. And he said, 'Lo: against the Jews it was taken. Therefore let the Jews return it and they shall save themselves. For a day and a night let them have time given them; and if they return it, well, they have saved themselves and are reprieved. For a day and a night let not a Jew in El-Kalil be slain. But if they do not return it, then shall their blood be on their own heads.'

"Then the angel left me and my strength returned so that the bones of my legs no longer shook; but for a little while my eyes were still dazed by the brightness, so that I could neither see nor grope my way. After certain minutes my sight came again and then I lost no time, but came hither; and now ye know the vision I have seen. I have not kept it secret from you. As for him who chooses not to listen, let his blood be on his head. My hands are henceforth clean in this matter."

"For a leader he's easily led," Grim whispered. "But for a liar he's not half bad. Now if Ali Baba ben Hamza has only done his end of the talking too, we ought to manage nicely. Drat him! Is he going to read to them? This session'll last all night if we don't look out."

THE Sheikh had opened a great illuminated copy of the Koran and was turning over the pages in search of some passage that would suit the occasion. But just as he began to roll his tongue around the opening syllables the south door opened and a man called into the mosque that the fire-gift was about beginning.

That was too much for the congregation. It was like announcing to a Sunday school that the circus was outside. Perhaps they would have sat still if the vision he had told of had not been related to the fire-gift. As it was they rose like one man and surged through the door to see this thing again that caused so much concern among the angels. We followed at the tail of the procession.

But it was hopeless to try to see from the steps. The men in front had been forced forward by those behind, who now blocked the door and stood jammed like herrings, while the men below tried to regain the vantage of the steps for a better view.

"Follow me!" said Grim suddenly and led us at a run back into the mosque, where we overtook the Sheikh at the north end and were just in time to get out through a side door after him before he locked it. Grim seemed to know the way perfectly, for he did not hesitate but led across a small court, and making use of a buttress in a corner climbed up on a wall built of gigantic blocks of dressed stone. It was three feet wide on top, and at the end of thirty yards or so it gave us a perfect view of the court of the Haram and the crowd that milled below.

That was a sight worth seeing, for the fitful light of two oil lanterns shone on a sea of savage faces and, except where an occasional lantern swung in a man's hand, the rest was all black shadow. It was as if the night had a thousand heads. Not one body was visible from where we stood. Countless faces swam in a sea of darkness. And presently they sang, as the men of El-Kalil have always done when more than a dozen of them get together.

It would have been effective singing anywhere, at any time. The tune was as old as El-Kalil, which was a city in the time of Abraham. One man sang the words of a song that had no rhyme, but only a wavering, varying meter; and whenever they thought he had trolled out enough of it they suddenly thundered out the same refrain, bowing their heads together like pouter-pigeons making love. And the least apparent thing was its absurdity. It was the heart of El-Kalil responding to the voice of ages plucking at the strings of memory and stirring the racial passion.

> "And he (Ishmael) will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of his brethren."

That night I almost understood the ancient curse, or blessing—whichever it is—that has lived with the Arabs since Hagar, their first mother, was driven forth into the desert to face the fruits of jealousy alone. You can't explain the Arab in any other way. In his heart and generally near enough the surface is the sense of being heir to the wrongs of ages, and a sort of joy in outlawry as birthright. It lives in his scant music, in the primitive, few measures of his dance, in his poetry, in his nomadic instinct; and it comes to the surface at the least excuse or without any, whenever a crowd gathers—simple, savage, manly, not easy to condemn.

"There are fields, there are olives, there are grapes in El-Kalil."

"ALLAH! OH! IL-ALLAH!"

"There are mountains all about her where the black goats graze, where the herdsmen keep the cattle, where the barley laughs and rustles in the wind."

"ALLAH! OH! IL-ALLAH!"

"There are springs of lovely water never-failing, and the almond and the *mishmish* bloom and fruit in El-Kalil."

"ALLAH! OH! IL-ALLAH!"

"In a valley on a mountain like a virgin's bosom, fair and full of scent is El-Kalil."

"ALLAH! OH! IL-ALLAH!"

"Up among the stars, the colored stars of heaven, much desired of other men, the city of our fathers, the city of Er-Rahman,[*] the home of Ali Bakka,[†] the place of the Kashkala,[‡] the tomb, the tomb of Jesse[§], the place of Forty Martyrs, the delight of all the saints is El-Kalil."

"ALLAH! OH! IL-ALLAH!"

"Like her flowers, like the soft eyes of her daughters, like her honey, like the bloom upon her bosom in the morning is the glass of El-Kalil."

"ALLAH! OH! IL-ALLAH!"

"And the swords of El-Kalil, the keen swords, the strong swords swinging in her son's hands—mighty are the swords of El-Kalil!"

"ALLAH! OH! IL-ALLAH!"

The song was beginning to get dangerous. The desert centuries have taught the Arab that beauty and peace are but oases in the midst of cruelty; and just as he must leave the place of meditative calm to strive against hot winds and drought and bitterness before he can rest again, so his mind moves swiftly from delight in beauty to the thought of cruelty and death.

But a path was cleft suddenly down the midst of the sea of faces like the winding, narrow channel of black water when the ice breaks up in Spring; and down the middle of that came Ali Baba, prancing with his skirts tucked up and followed by his sixteen sons. Each one of them breathed orange-colored flame out of his mouth at intervals and danced between-whiles, swaying to right and left to belch fire at the crowd and frighten them.

It was weird—astonishingly well-staged. You could only see arms, legs, bodies for a moment when the fire flashed; then the velvet darkness of the night between walls swallowed all but faces that milled and surged as if borne on an inky river.

The seventeen thieves passed swiftly, too well-versed in the lore of trickery to give spectators time for keen inspection. They vanished through the outer gate into the night and the gap closed up behind them. Then the song began again, starting this time on the theme of blood and sacrifice. Swords began to leap out and a roar went up from the outer circles of the throng that gained in volume as infection grew, and at the end of about two minutes some one with a bull's voice thundered:

"Now for the Jews! In the name of Allah, kill the Jews!"

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[*] The friend of God. i.e. Abraham. [†] A saint who died A. D. 1271. [‡] A famous spring. [§] The father of King David.

"To the sword with them in the name of Allah!" another yelled from the darkness just below us. And a pause followed, of sudden, utter silence. They were wondering. They had heard strange things that night and seen strange sights. The yeast of uncertainty was working.

Then Grim took a long chance. We were thirty feet above them out of reach and there were no stones they could have flung; but the risk was infinitely greater than that. If he failed to touch the right chord of emotion; if he said the wrong word or overplayed the right appeal; if one ill-considered phrase should seize their fancy and fire imagination to take flight in violence, or one careless hint spur resentment, they would surge out of the Haram like a flood. The Governorate would be the first point of attack; then the Jews; then, perhaps, when the looting was over there would be a march on Jerusalem and a mess midway to the tune of stuttering machine guns.

Grim's voice broke the silence like a prophet's; for you have to speak in measured cadence if you hope to make an impress on the Moslem mind when the wild man heritage is uppermost and fierce emotion sways him. They could see only the outline of his figure against the deep purple setting of the stars and in those Arab clothes he looked enough dignified to be a true seer. Cohen and I drew away from him to give him the full dramatic force of loneliness.

"Brothers! The bones of Abraham lie under us. It is written that 'They plotted, but Allah plotted and of plotters Allah is the best.'* When Abraham went forth to war with kings, he waited for the word that should send him forth, and he took no share of the plunder, lest one should say an enemy and not Allah had enriched him. Who are ye but sons of Abraham?

"We have heard and seen strange things this night," continued Grim. "And it is written, 'When ye prided yourselves on your numbers it availed you nothing.'* Is it wiser to be headstrong at the bidding of the rash or to wait for the appointed time and see? For all is written. 'Who shall set forward by an hour the courses of the stars or change the contour of the hills or postpone judgment?' *Allah ykun maak!*"†

He had struck the right note. He had them. A murmur of low voices answered him and though the words were hardly audible the purport was plain; it was something about Almightiness and Allah. You can not separate the Moslem from his fatalism and it works either way, making him fierce or meek according to circumstance and the method of appeal. Unless some unexpected incident should occur to change their mood again it was likely they would cut no throats that night.

But the risk entailed by lingering another minute on the scene would have been deadly. Questions and answers might have produced the very spark needed to fire them to fanatical zeal again. The cue was to disappear at once, leaving the dramatic effect at its height and there was only one way to do that.

Black shadow lay behind us and beneath. I could just make out a suggestion of something solid that might be a roof and might not, but there was no time for investigation. Grim seemed to step off the wall into nothing and the darkness swallowed him. I jumped and Cohen lay down on the wall and rolled off, clinging to the edge with both hands.

THAT wasn't a roof. Grim had landed feet-foremost on a lower wall that met ours at right angles and it was the shadow cast by that that looked like something solid. I fell for a life-time, wondering what death would be like when the earth should rise at last and meet me, and was disgusted—disappointed—maddened when the end came.

They cover up the water as a rule in Hebron; but that stone tank was open and the green scum floated on it inches thick. There were long green slimy weeds that clung and got into your mouth and eyes and if the water of the Styx tastes worse than that I'd rather live in this world for a while yet.

But it was not all bitterness. There was Cohen. He had to jump, too; and when I had scrambled out I told him all about it and then waited until his fingers lost their hold on the wall and he came catapulting down for his green bath just as I had done; and he liked it even less. He made remarks in Yiddish that I couldn't understand and refused to apologize for having splashed me.

Then Grim came, cool and dry, having found some goat's stairway down to *terra firma*.

"Both alive?" he asked. "Well—what's

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*From the Koran.

†God be with you.

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the general impression? What do you think of it all?"

"Me?" said Cohen. "Think? ——! I've got to follow them thieves down into Abraham's cave or bust with curiosity!"

"You'll bust then, for it can't be done!" said Grim.

CHAPTER VII

"Your friends, Jimgrim, don't forget it!"

WE HURRIED back to the Governorate as straight as you can go through the mazy streets of Hebron and found Jones asleep in his boots on the bench at the end of the hall. De Crespigny was dozing on the window-seat in the sitting-room, and made a show of being angry with Jones for not having gone to bed.

"Fat lot of use you'll be this time tomorrow!"

"Do you see me bedded down, while you face the music alone?" Jones answered testily.

"Seems to me I've heard somewhere of juniors obeying orders!"

"You told me to go and get some sleep. I did."

Grim recounted what had happened at the Haram, while de Crespigny mixed drinks and a sleepy Arab servant stripped Cohen and me of our slimy wet garments.

"So you can both sleep safely until morning," Grim assured them. "Tell you what: I shan't need Cohen until after breakfast. Let him sleep in the hall. He'll give the alarm if a mouse breaks in. He's nervous."

"Noivous? Me? After breakin' into a mosque an' doin' a Hippodrome high-divin' stunt into a dark tank? You mean noivy!"

"I mean sleep," said Grim. "There's a bellyful in store for you tomorrow. Thought I'd try you out this evening. You've made good. Tomorrow you win the game for us."

"If you're countin' on me to make a home run I'll start now!" said Cohen. "Give me one o' them camels and I'll make it quicker! Mnyum-m! Never knew a hot cocktail could sink without makin' you sick. Does the business, too. Saves ice. Start a new fashion if I live through this. Warm drinks! Sure, give me another one!"

"Can you spare me one policeman, Crep?"

"Which?"

"Any one at all who knows Abraham's Oak and the caves thereabouts," Grim answered.

"Righto! I'll dig you out a man."

"Tell him to bring handcuffs."

"When d'you want him?"

"Now. I've got to move quickly. Our side-show's scheduled for tomorrow night and we don't want a rival act playing the same pitch. We've got to pull up that fire-gift by the roots. Besides, we need the makings. Some of the notables are likely to call on you at dawn, 'Crep, and tell you their version of tonight's events. If I were you I'd take the line that you'll permit crowds in the streets leading to the Haram tomorrow night to see the Jews return the fire-gift; but make them swear by their beards there shall be no bloodshed if the Jews don't disappoint them. Take their pledge in writing for it. Then how would it be if you offered to grace the ceremony with your official presence?"

"Good. That'll do to remind 'em of what they've promised. But Lord help us if you fail, Grim! Are you sure of the Jews?"

"That's Cohen's end."

"Say, see here," put in Cohen, "I've told you more'n once these Jews are Orthodox. They'd no more listen to me than if I was a Piute Indian. They'd sooner listen to an Indian!"

"Go to sleep on the bench and dream of a way of persuading them," Grim suggested pleasantly. "Policeman ready, Crep?"

The servant had found me dry clothes belonging to the estate of an Arab who had been hanged for triple murder a couple of weeks before and Grim and I left by the front door again with the policeman shouldering a loaded rifle just behind us.

This time instead of turning toward the city we went almost to the opposite direction, between orchard walls, by a path so stony that you tripped at every second step. The policeman's steel-capped boots struck sparks behind us and the noise we made set little foxes scampering, then brought them back again to leap on the wall and look. Surely all nature wonders at the clumsiness of man.

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WE WERE in open country at the end of half a mile, but that brought us small advantage for the tilled hillsides to left and right of us were so much blackness, and how in the world Grim proposed to find any given cave, or the man who hid in it, was more than I could guess. You could see dim ghosts that were thousand-year-old olive-trees and goblins that were limestone rocks. Little owls screamed mockery from almost arm's length and one or two hyenas dogged our steps snickering obscenity. The rest was black, unfathomable night.

But we came at last to a lane that led due northward by the pole-star and Grim led the way up that, following a cart-wheel track beside a wall. And presently we emerged into a clump of pine-trees that were startling because so unexpected in that land, where men have cut for fuel whatever bears no fruit that men can eat and the goats have seen to it that nothing grows again. There were thirty or forty pines with grass beneath them, clean and well-kept.

"Care to see Abraham's Oak?" asked Grim—showman again; he could not rest until you had seen everything. "I think Ali Baba and his gang will come here before dawn; they always used to. We'll have to beat it soon, but you've time to see the tree. There'll be no time afterward."

It stood within two hundred feet of us, surrounded by a stone wall and an iron railing—a veritable oak, so huge and ancient that a man's life seemed an absurd thing as we stood beneath. Under the stars, with shadows all about, it looked vaster than by daylight, its dignity unmarred by signs of decay and only its age and hugeness to be wondered at—those and the silence that it seemed to breathe.

"They had to fence it to keep thieves away," said Grim. "No, not only souvenir-sharps. The thieves of Hebron used to meet under the pines and set their fires against this oak. Abraham is supposed to have pitched his tent under this identical tree, so it must have been big then, and that's three thousand years ago. It has been a rendezvous ever since. Ali Baba loves the spot. Come on."

We passed through a gate and up-hill to where big buildings and a tower loomed lonely against the sky, I too busy wondering about Abraham and that old tree to take any interest in modern convents. The patriarch came from Ur of the Chaldees, wherever that was. What sort of tents did he have, and how many? According to Genesis he must have had a small tribe with him; what did they look like camped around that tree and how were his slaves and retainers armed?

Modern happenings amuse me more when I can follow their roots back into the subsoil of time; but that leads to brown study and hurt shins. I barked mine against a modern American plow, as Grim turned aside along the hilltop and picked up a big stone, to thunder with it on the wooden door of a high square tower.

It stood apart from the convent buildings, modern and unlovely—might have been a belfry, for all you could tell in the dark—perhaps one of those vainglorious beginnings the religious congregations make with thousands of yet-to-be-solicited contributors in mind. The door was opened presently by an old Russian female in a night-cap, who screamed at sight of us.

She knew no Arabic—no English. Grim beckoned the policeman and his rifle turned out to be a theme she comprehended, for she crossed herself in a quick-fire flurry and stood aside. Grim gave her a coin, for which she blessed him profusely—or so I suppose; the words were Russian—and we entered a square room dimly lighted by a night-light that burned before an ikon in a corner. It formed the whole ground-story of the tower, bedroom and living-room in one, and was chock-a-block with rubbishy furniture, but clean.

In the corner opposite the ikon was an iron stair with a hand-rail, like one of those that stokers use to emerge by from the boiling bowels of a ship. Grim started up it, but told the policeman to stay below and keep the door shut, presumably to prevent the old lady from communicating with her friends outside—for you never know in Palestine what innocents are earning money on the side by acting as thieves' telegraph. I followed Grim.

Story after story the iron ladder twisted on itself in pitchy blackness, until we came out at last on a flat roof with a waist-high parapet, crossed by two ropes on which the beldame's washing hung—not edifying as a spectacle, nor pleasant when the wind drove it in your face. There was nothing else to see there except the stars that looked almost within reach. Grim leaned his back against the parapet and proceeded to admire them.

"What next?" I asked, for since the only ones I can ever identify are the dipper and the pole-star I soon grow inattentive to astronomy.

"You'd better sleep. Nothing more till sunrise."

So I did. It was pretty chilly up there without a blanket three thousand feet above sea-level, but some of the old lady's damp laundry helped to temper it and the balance went under me to soften contact with the roof. For a few minutes I lay listening to Grim's mellow voice chanting familiar lines, staring upward drowsily and growing almost dizzy with a sense of vastness.

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained——"

But when he changed to Hebrew and boomed out the psalm as it was written by a man who may have wondered at the same sky from the very hill on which we were, I dozed off. Nothing can send you to sleep quicker than a monolog in Hebrew, and I recommend it to the nurse-maids.

When I awoke Grim was still keeping watch, but the stars were paling in the mauve and gold of coming dawn. The policeman had come up. I suppose Grim had been below to fetch him without waking me and an annoying sense of having been babied by both of them helped dissipate the stiff discomfort and the civilized yearning for a tooth-brush and hot coffee. Besides, I might have missed something.

I came and stood between them where they leaned over the parapet staring down-hill past the convent in the direction of the clump of pines and the iron-fenced oak. The great tree developed slowly out of pearl-colored mist as the sun rose, looking weary and decrepit now that the cloak of night was off, its gnarled, gray lower limbs propped up on wooden beams and the huge trunk split under the weight of centuries.

But Grim had seen that tree a hundred times. It needed more than another view of it at dawn to make him and an Arab policeman, born within a mile of it, hang by the waist over that parapet and stare like mast-headed seamen in an Atlantic fog.

"*Dahrak! Shuf!*" said the policeman suddenly, and both men ducked until their heads were almost level with the masonry. A slight puff of wind rolled the mist apart, producing the effect of turning on more light, and through the iron railings above the wall surrounding the oak I could make out the figures of men squatted in a circle. They might have been gambling, for they faced inward and their heads were close together. Secretive and at least a bit excited they were certainly.

"Now watch 'em!" said Grim. "For ——'s sake watch 'em!" I think he mistrusted his own eyes after the long vigil.

When the comet-tail of the mist had vanished along the valley in front of a wind that shook down the dew in jeweled showers, the men who sat under the tree rose in a hurry as if they had let time steal a march on them and helped one another over the fence in something of a panic. Then, in single file, they started across country toward the opposite hillside. I counted eighteen of them and the man who led was some one I had never seen before—a man who walked with a limp and wore a *tarboosh* wrapped in calico. The others were unmistakable even at that distance—old Ali Baba and his sons.

"If we lose sight of them we're done for! Tell you what," said Grim, "you and the policeman stay up here. I'll follow them. We ought to manage it between us that way. If it seems to you I'm off the trail, give one long shout; they'll think it's a herdsman rounding up stray cattle, I'll understand and cast again, or wait for you. If you see I'm surely on their heels, you two follow and catch up as fast as you can."

THE REPEATED the instructions to the policeman in Arabic and vanished. While we watched him run down-hill the old woman came up panting, to abuse me in voluble Russian about her crumpled cotton underclothes; but Russian is one of several things I don't know, so we didn't grow intimate. The policeman bundled all her laundry up and threw if off the roof, which seemed to me hardly tactful in the circumstances; so I gave her a coin and she blessed me and we let it go at that.

Thereafter I could hardly watch Grim and the swiftly retreating eighteen for wondering at the view. You could see clear across the whole of Palestine—the Moab Hills beyond the Dead Sea to the eastward, and over to the west the blue of the Mediterranean and thirty miles of white surf pounding on golden sand. A little, little country, that had managed to make more impression on the world than many a big one!

Grim followed as far as the road we had come by in the night without troubling to conceal himself. After that, though, he took to hiding behind rocks and running forward in spurts when he dared. But all that trouble turned out to be unnecessary, for before long we saw all eighteen men disappear behind a scrawny olive-tree in such extraordinary fashion that a cave at that spot was the only possible explanation. It was two thirds of the way up the opposite hill, about a mile, or something less, from where we watched.

So the policeman shooed me off the roof as if I were a goat out of bounds—grumbled at me for taking so much time on the ladder and at the old dame downstairs for not having breakfast ready for us—and panted behind me down the hill with a running comment on the weight of his rifle and the absurdity of racing when a sensible man might walk. He was a perfectly good policeman, raised in the don't-do-it school, and faithful as an old work-horse, with a horse's sense of what is due him on the grades.

We found Grim waiting for us behind a big rock and when the Arab had recovered breath enough to swear with we got orders to engage.

"Can you see the back of a man's head just beyond the olive-tree? No, not that; that's a hawk feeding; look ten feet to the left. There. See him move? Mahommed ben Hamza keeping lookout. Never occurred to the fool to look this way, or he'd have seen you two experts maneuvering! Now there's just a chance they'll prove ugly. One of us may go West this trip. Spread, and come on them from three sides; then if they cut up rough there'll be at least one of us to break back with the news. I'll snoop up this side and approach first. You two get over the brow of the hill and watch what happens to me. Reenforce me as required or when I beckon."

So we made a short circuit and ran and lay a hundred yards apart on top of the hill. The policeman raised his rifle and as soon as Grim caught sight of it he left cover and walked straight forward, singing a shepherd song. But quite as clearly as Grim's voice I could hear the drumming of an airplane flying low from the direction of Ludd; and the man outside the cave was watching that intently, so that he neither saw nor heard Grim until he was close up.

The plane circled twice over Hebron and departed. Grim went closer and spoke. I couldn't hear what he said, but Mahommed at the cave-mouth jumped and then put his hands up. Grim ordered him down into the cave and beckoned to us. I did not know until then that Grim had as much as a pistol with him.

The cave was the usual thing. All that country is full of caves and every one of them has been a sepulcher until another generation or any army came and robbed it. There was a low, hewn entrance that you had to stoop to get by, and a short dark passage with a sharp turn, beyond which you could imagine anything you liked. You could enter at your peril; a man couldn't possibly defend himself in the gut where the passage turned.

"They know now who's here," said Grim. "I'm going to take a chance. They've had time to make their minds up. You'd better stay outside."

But I had not had that run on an empty stomach just to cool my heels outside a cave and told him so.

"All right," he laughed. "Suit yourself. We'll leave Mustapha."

But the policeman wouldn't hear of it either and got point-blank mutinous. He asked what sort of figure he would cut going back to the Governorate to report that we had had our throats cut while he looked on. He said he did not mind getting killed, since that was likely to happen just now at any time, and demanded to go in first. So Grim let him fix his bayonet and follow me, with strict orders not to start anything unless we were attacked first.

And after all that fuss there was not any opposition, although there well might have been. Twenty feet beyond the turn the passage opened into an egg-shaped cave, where all eighteen men sat solemnly around a lighted candle. The eighteenth—he of the tarboosh wrapped in calico—looked like a lunatic. They had taken his long knife away—old Ali Baba had it laid across his knees—and two of the sons—the giant and the fellow with the long arms—were sitting one on either side of him, leaning inwards, with the obvious purpose of seizing him if he tried to move.

I HAVE never seen a more ferocious-looking devil. He had a lean, mean face with scars on it and loose lips like an animal's that seemed to have been given him for the purpose of hurling incentive language at a crowd; they made a sort of trumpet when he thrust them out. He had a cataract in one eye, but the other made up for it by being preternaturally bright and black and cunning; and his ears were set far back like an angry dog's.

"Peace! Peace!" urged Ali Baba, as Grim and Mustapha and I stood upright with our backs to the entrance. Grim had put his pistol out of sight, but the policeman stood on guard like a terrier watching rats.

"Peace! Peace!" all sixteen sons repeated after the patriarch.

"Fools! Idiots!" yelled the eighteenth man and tried to spring to his feet, but the men on either side restrained him. I think even a gorilla would have been helpless in those titanic arms that pressed him downward like a cork into a bottle until he seemed a full foot shorter than he actually was and gasped under the strain.

"What will you, Jimgrim?" asked Ali Baba.

Grim nodded in the direction of the eighteenth man.

"I've come for him."

But the gentleman did not propose to be fetched and he had a way of his own of making the objection obvious. He couldn't move for the giant on one side and the monstrous-armed fellow on the other continued to lean their weight on him, but he could speak and yell blasphemy and threaten; and he surely did, filling the cave with a clamor like a dog-fight.

The blasphemy was his great mistake, for they were simply a pious gang of thieves, despite their own sacrilege, and his coarsely mouthed Egyptian liberties with sacred words hurt their feelings. They might have taken his part with more determination but for that.

"You fools! Kill them! Kill all three of them!" he yelled and followed it with frightful imprecations—foul, filthy epithets all mixed up with the names of angels and Allah so that Ali Baba protested and his sixteen sons clucked after him in chorus like a lot of scandalized hens.

"What else have you got in the cave besides that beauty?" Grim inquired.

"Nothing, Jimgrim. This is but a meeting-place," said Ali Baba.

"Um-m-m! Nothing under that stone you're sitting on?"

"Nothing, Jimgrim. I am old. The floor of the cave is cold. My sons give me the place of honor."

"Suppose you let me look."

Ali Baba hesitated and collected eyes like a hostess breaking up a dinner-party. It was perfectly obvious that at a word from their chief the whole gang would resist, but Grim stepped into the midst of the circle very coolly with his back to the most dangerous men and waited smiling. I knew what he had in mind. At the first symptom of attack he was going to put his foot on the candle. I got ready to bolt into the throat of the cave ahead of him where, with one rifle and one pistol he and I could keep the lot of them at bay while the policeman could run for help. He told me afterwards that he would have sent me running and kept the policeman by him; so the imaginary glory of a scrap that never happened is not mine after all.

What saved the situation was the Egyptian's tactics. Fired by his own savage imagination he supposed Grim was going to lay hands on Ali Baba and he was one of the all-too-plentiful gentry who believe that numbers are the only unanswerable argument.

"Idiots! Kill him!" he screamed and began to struggle with the men who held him, burying his yellow teeth in the giant's hand and striking out like a great ape simultaneously with arms and legs.

Now that giant was a great good-natured fellow—the apple of old Ali Baba's eye and the pride of the gang. The blood squirted from his hand and the patriarch sprang up from his place to interfere, but not so quickly as the youngest, Mahommed, he who had helped us once at El-Kerak. He sprang across the floor from behind Grim and beat the Egyptian over the eyes with a fist like an olive-knot until he let go, stunned.

Then, while they crowded to make a fuss about the big man's injury Grim very calmly lifted up the stone on which Ali Baba had been sitting. Funnily enough, I expected to see jewels and all the rest of the trimmings of the legendary robbers' cave—golden money at any rate and perhaps a big iron chest with rings to lift it by. But Grim looked perfectly contented with the little paper packages that lay in the hole, neatly fastened with red string and laid in a circle like a clutch of flattened eggs.

"Who stole these from the doctor?" he asked, stowing them carefully away about his person. "You, Ali Baba?"

"Allah forbid! I would not rob the *hakim*. This dog of an Egyptian was in the hospital to have his eyes healed. He knows English and can read the names on labels."

"Did you put him up to it?"

"Not I! He begged a meal from us afterwards and offered to show us how he fooled foreigners for money in the hotels of Massa (Egypt). So we came with him to this cave, where he had hidden what he stole; and here he breathed fire, and showed us how to do it. But he kept the secret to himself of how to mix the powders, putting the stuff on our tongues and teaching us until we could do it perfectly."

"So you can't work the fire-gift without him, eh?"

"More is the pity!"

"That settles that, then! Did you tell the people what I said about postponing action until tonight?"

"I and my sons. We all spoke of it. Some were angry with us. Some were pleased. Some doubted. But we, who had the fire-gift, had the last word. Jimgrim, we have kept faith."

I went over and looked at the Egyptian, who was still stunned, gurgling through his gruesome mouth and bleeding pretty freely from Mahommed's blows that would have felled a lion. The scars on his face looked like burns at close quarters; and that was likely, for they say that nearly all beginners at that trickster's trade have ghastly accidents.

"What is this about the fire-gift going back, Jimgrim?" Ali Baba asked.

"It goes back tonight."

"And we? Do you mean to put us to shame? Are we to have no hand in this? Is our honor not in your keeping?"

The gang crowded close on Grim to hear his answer, and Mustapha clucked nervously between his teeth, rattling the rifle to call attention to it. I was as scared as he was, but if Grim minded in the least he did not show it.

"What's this talk about honor?" he asked. "Are you trying to add to the terms of a bargain after it is made?"

"No, no, no!" they chorused and he laughed at them.

"What then?"

"We are your friends," said Ali Baba. "*Inshallah*, a man such as you is thoughtful for his friends!"

"Your friends, Jimgrim, don't forget it!"

"Think of El-Kerak, Jimgrim!"

"Who provided camels for you when you went in pursuit of the Beersheba thieves?"

"When you were governor here, who brought word about the man from Bethesda—he who sought to knife you in the night? Remember that, Jimgrim!"

"Yes, and who slew the fakir who had gone mad?"

"Didn't we save the life of the British officer, who had offended everybody and was mobbed?"

"Yes, and lied afterwards to save him from his own people! We have done everything that you ever asked of us, Jimgrim; isn't our father Ali Baba's honor in your keeping?"

"Well, what is it you want?" asked Grim.

"That we shall not be made the laughing-stock of El-Kalil!" Ali Baba answered solemnly. And at that they all sat down, in a circle as before, with Grim standing in the midst. So he moved the stone deliberately with his foot and sat down too, whereat they all clothed themselves in a new contentment. The Arab thinks far more highly of a judgment given sitting.

"This is a new bargain," Grim began after a moment's thought.

"*Inshallah!*"

"The terms are these: The old bargain continues until the end of this affair."

"*Na'am, na'am.*" ("Yes, yes.")

"Ali Baba shall retain such personal dignity as I can contrive for him, but the method must be mine."

"*Na'am, na'am.*"

"In return for it, Ali Baba and all his sixteen sons and grandsons shall be the friends of the present governor, de Crespigny, and of his assistant Jones."

"*Taib!* They are worthy of it. They are bold. The right spirit is in both of them! We agree!"

"And nothing in this agreement shall be construed to mean that Ali Baba and his gang shall not all or severally go to jail, if convicted of breaking the law in future. They go to jail in the proper spirit, without malice, if caught and convicted."

"*Taib!* Agreed!"

"Very well," said Grim. "Now three or four of you pick up that Egyptian, and take him to the jail at once!"

CHAPTER VIII

"Carry on, boys!"

SO WE, who had gone forth that night but a party of three, returned a twenty-man platoon, dumping our prisoner at the jail en route. They lugged him like a corpse with heels trailing, and he hardly recovered consciousness before being locked up, which was a good thing for him as well as us, for he began acting like a caged wild animal at once, yelling as he wrenched at the cell bars, setting both feet against them, cracking huge shoulder-muscles in the effort to break loose.

There was almost a mutiny when Grim insisted on six of Ali Baba's gang offering themselves at once to Dr. Cameron for a body-guard.

"Ask him to come soon, and you hold that Egyptian while he attends to him."

"But Jimgrim, why? Surely such a man is better dead! And he is cunning. Later, when the rage has left him he will make plans and talk to the other prisoners through the bars."

Grim laughed. "And give away the secret of the fire-gift, eh? Tell 'em you haven't it any longer? Too bad!"

"One might go in there and kill him, as if it were by accident," suggested Mahommed ben Hamza genially—he who had done the damage in the first place. "Or I could strike him through the bars, thus!"

"You for the gallows if you dare!" Grim answered. "There's a row of old cells below-ground. Some of you men go down and clean out one of them thoroughly. I'll have him put down there after the doctor's through with him; then, if all's well and you all play the game straight, he shall be taken to Jerusalem."

All except six of them and Ali Baba trooped down-stairs with the easy familiarity of old frequenters of the place. They knew where the brooms and buckets were—whom to ask for soap—where to draw water; the whole routine of that establishment was at their finger's ends.

But Ali Baba and the six who went to offer their strong service to the doctor had to cool their heels. He was at the Governorate to breakfast, and had brought the nurse with him—a big, raw-boned Scots virgin from the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, where they call fish "fush" and the girl who can not do the work of two southron men is not thought much of. I think she could have licked that Egyptian single-handed. She and Cohen were already in an argument about religion, and just as we came in she was telling him he would better mend his doctrine while there was time.

"For hell's an awful place!"

"Maybe you know?" he suggested. "Tell me some more, miss."

She talked to him about fire and brimstone all through breakfast without any kind of malice but a perfectly sincere desire to scare him into Christianity.

"Ain't you afraid you'll get killed before night?" he asked, trying at last to turn the subject.

But she was not afraid of anything except bad doctrine, and only of that in case it should get by her unrebuked. As Cameron had said the day before, she was a good lass; she would stand.

"Tell me about heaven," sighed Cohen. "I'm tired of hearin' about hell."

"Man, man! You may be in hell before bedtime!" she answered and Grim laughed aloud.

"She's quite right, Aaron. Initiation takes place directly after breakfast. Third degree follows, and hell tonight!"

All through breakfast there were interruptions. De Crespigny had to keep leaving the table to interview local notables, who called to complain that the city was growing more turbulent every hour and they could not fairly be held responsible.

Jones swallowed a few mouthfuls and started off alone to look alert and confident in the swarming *suk*, since to appear the reverse of afraid was about the only available resource, though that seemed limitless. And just as breakfast finished there came once more the splutter and bark of a motorcycle down-street.

"Can you beat that?" asked de Crespigny, coming in and handing the dispatch to Grim. They let me look at it; in fact, it was passed around the table afterward, although the envelope was stamped SECRET as usual in enormous letters:

> Your message of yesterday received. Troops here are busy. Governors of outlying places are expected to carry on accordingly. A demonstration will be made by airplane from Ludd this morning; the pilot will be expected to report whether all is quiet or otherwise. In the event of his reporting all

> quiet no action is expected to be taken in your direction before tomorrow morning, when a Sikh patrol will be sent with machine guns if it can be spared. Please report by bearer if there are any symptoms of a concerted attack on Jerusalem, rumors having reached us.

It was signed by the same staff-major who had written the message of the day before. But this time there was a foot-note, not typewritten but in the angular longhand of the administrator himself.

> Carry on, boys. Kettle.

"That postscript's typical of 'Pots and Pans,'" said Grim. "I'll bet he's sent help to some of the weak sisters elsewhere and counts on you fellows to worry through. There's probably a raid in force coming up from the Jordan Valley and every available man in Jerusalem combed up to deal with it. How will you answer?"

De Crespigny wrote two lines and showed them:

> Carrying on, sir. No sign of attack on Jerusalem from this place yet. Sikhs welcome when available.

"Good!" said Grim. "He likes telegrams. Man fired at on the way?"

"Says not."

"That proves nothing," put in Cameron. "I've been five-and-twenty years here, and know their ways. They're flocking into the city. So the fields are deserted. The Turks understood how to deal with them. The Turks, in a crisis like this, would have hanged out of hand any man found in the streets who did not belong to the city. I've seen them strung up in front of the jail in a row like haddock drying in the sun. Djemal Pasha would have straightened out this business in less than half a day. He was a rascal, though; he'd have lined his pockets afterwards with fines that would have kept them all too poor to make trouble for a year to come! Well, we're not Turks and they're gone. But I heard ex-president Roosevelt speak in Egypt. 'Rule or get out!' That was his advice. Speaking as a missionary, I'd say take the latter half of it—get out! Teach, yes, if they'll listen; but teach 'em what? They're as moral as we are. Teach 'em our Western commercialism? God forbid! Literature? We don't read our own books, so why should they? Which of you can quote me half a line from Robbie Burns?"

"Speaking of burns, doc," put in Grim, "You've got to teach me some chemistry before lunch—something to prevent them."

"I'm a very busy man."

"Have you plenty of drugs?"

"I've plenty of nothing! Fifteen hundred pounds a year our Mission scrapes together for this hospital, and out of that must come my salary, if, as and when I choose to draw it. I've drawn it seven times in twenty years. Ye'd think Hebron would contribute something; it did at times under the Turks; but now all the rascals do is steal my stores. Teach, eh? Come wi' me to the hospital and I'll show ye how one man and one trained nurse care for eighty patients in a forenoon."

SO COHEN, Grim and I walked over with him and the lady from the Hebrides and he barked with pleasure at sight of the paper packets that Grim laid on his office table in the trim stone mission building.

"This man Cohen has got to be made fire-proof!" Grim announced.

Cameron smiled.

"Has Miss Gordon's sermon made him so afraid of hell as that?"

"The point is, can you do it for us, doc? Or must we experiment?"

"Well, there are preparations that so indurate the cuticle as to render it insensible to a very high degree of heat."

"Are the ingredients in these packets?"

"Aye, some of them. These could be improved on."

"What would you add?"

"Quicksilver, but I've none to spare. I think I can recall a formula, though, that I once used for the hands of a Turkish soldier who was employed in the castle armory on some hot metal work. Let's see—mnmn—spirit of sulfur—onion juice—essence of rosemary—*sal ammoniac*—that's all. You could make a paste of these drugs on the table, but it would be liable to form a hard film that might crack, with dangerous consequences. The other's better; I've a notion it's what they used in mediæval times when people went through the ordeal by fire—walking on hot plow-shares, ye know, and all that hocus-pocus."

"Here's your patient," said Grim. "Make him hell-proof, please!"

He pulled Cohen forward by the arm and the poor chap's face changed color under the tan.

"Why me? Say, I'm not afraid of hell! You quit your kiddin'! I've had about enough of this practical jokin'! That tank in the dark was my positively last performance!"

"Listen, old man—we've nobody but you," said Grim. "You've got to carry the big end. All we can do is support you and watch points. You know perfectly well it would be no use trying to argue with the Jews of this place; we've got to show them. If you prove to them you can handle fire without getting burned and I prove to them that they'll all be dead before night unless they sit into the game, we can make at least some of them play. It's the only chance. If you should back down now, we're done for! Go ahead, doc—mix the devil's undershirt. See that Satan has nothing on this man when it comes to squatting on the slag!"

"What? Have I got to sit on fire? Without pants?"

"No, not as bad as that."

"There's a word of advice I'll give ye," said Cameron. "It's a simple matter to treat a man's skin so that he can sit on hot coals, or walk on them, or take them in his hands. Ye may even put them in your mouth; but there's the danger. That's very dangerous. Ye can treat the inside of a man's mouth so that flame won't hurt it; but ye can't reach the membrane of the throat or the lungs and I wouldn't change places with the man who breathed flame inward!

"That's how most of these fire-eaters ye see performing in Cairo and places like that come to a bad end. They don't die so quickly but they've time to suffer the agony of the damned. I'd recommend ye to be very careful. And mind ye, I'm not asking what ye're up to. It's none o' my business."

It was a long job squeezing out the juice of onions and mixing up the different ingredients, but Grim and I lent a hand and Cohen watched like a victim getting ready for the stake. He had a feeling, that nobody could blame him for, of being put upon; and his naturally alert business instinct made him suspicious of taking what looked like more than his share of the risk, to say nothing of the physical danger involved in fooling with fire.

But Grim kept talking to him and did not make the mistake of minimizing what he had to do. He took the other line, making use of rather subtle flattery, saying how lucky we were to have a genuine, sure-fire American Jew to show the Orthodox crowd of Hebron how to save themselves.

But there wasn't really the least doubt about Cohen. He would kick and complain for the simple business purpose of emphasizing his stake in the proceedings; that much was second nature. And he was certainly afraid; but so was I, and I don't think Grim felt any too confident under his mask of cool amusement. But if Grim had told Cohen he was slated for sure death, though he would have argued the point undoubtedly, I'm pretty sure he would have gone ahead.

As a matter of fact, none of us was fooling himself very seriously about the chance of surviving that night's work. The prospect was too slim altogether. There were too many opportunities for a slip, however carefully and cunningly Grim might stage-manage the affair. Besides, we had not yet converted the Orthodox Jews of Hebron to our plan; and to lift up a mountain by the roots and plant it in the sea might prove not much more difficult than to persuade those frozen-souled conservatives.

It was best not to try to imagine what might happen if we were detected playing tricks with Moslem prejudices—as might easily turn out. The Sheikh of the mosque, for instance, might turn cold at the last minute and denounce us as the best way out of his own predicament.

But Cohen was finally stripped to the waist to an accompaniment of joshing, and every inch of his skin was covered carefully with the preparation. Then that was allowed to dry and the whole performance was repeated, until at last Cameron pronounced him fire-proof from the waist upwards. But he doubted it volubly, until Grim struck a match and made the first test, holding the flame against his body in a dozen places without producing the least sensation.

After that it was vaudeville. Cohen's spirits rose and his imagination with them. He staged a whole performance, and ballyhooed it in the bargain like a small-town circus side-show performer.

"Ladies and gents, you mayn't believe it, but the guy who ought to spill the talk for me is sick. After my performance at the last town I was red-hot and he feared I'd set the bed on fire. So he took a bucket of water and threw it over me. The water turned to steam and scalded him. Now watch! The original and only noncombustible asbestos man!"

Cameron had to hurry through his hospital and then go to the jail to attend to the Egyptian, held down by the iron hands of Ali Baba's men. So he lent Grim a battered old book on ancient magic and left us.

Cohen was so full of high spirits and original ideas for stunts by that time that it was quite a job to get him to pay attention, but Grim took as much pains with him as if he were a performing animal. Ali Baba had to be brought in, anointed with the dope and taught too, for the old Arab's accomplishment was crude and limited, although he was a first-class showman in his own way.

Thereafter the whole plan for the night's unlawful ritual had to be worked out in detail and there Ali Baba was a great help, for he understood the Arab mind and knowing Hebron of old could judge to a nicety just what would produce an effect and what would not. The hardest thing was to get Cohen imbued with a proper sense of solemnity, for he had a perfectly entire disrespect for every kind of ritual and was constitutionally inclined to make low comedy of it.

Again and again Grim impressed on him, Ali Baba seconding, the certainty that we, and every Jew in Hebron, would be killed that night unless he kept a straight face. He had no feeling for tribal history; none for pageantry; every suggestion Grim made he capped with a caricature of it.

"Say, when I reach the mosque steps, suppose I throw the fire in the Sheikh's face and set alight to his beard, what then?"

The rehearsal was cut short by the noise of rioting. We were hardly a quarter of a mile from the Governorate and through the open window came the yelling of a mob that surged by the Governorate gate. It bore no resemblance to the singing of the men who had come dancing up-street the previous day, but was shriller voiced, without rhythm, and there was the ominous mob-growl underneath it like the anger of a hundred upset hives.

"Ah!" remarked Ali Baba drily. "That will be the end of it all! No fire-gift tonight! Better run, Jimgrim! Run for Jerusalem while there is time! I would be sorry to see you with your throat cut!"

Grim was listening and signed to Ali Beba to be still. It was difficult to pick out words from the babel of noise downstreet, for the uproar came from a thousand throats; but it was clear they were shouting for de Crespigny, and that was a good sign as far as it went. If they had intended murder they would have rushed the building, instead of calling for the governor to come and talk to them.

Suddenly Grim ran from the room and I after him. I didn't stop to reason it out, but followed intuitively—partly from a sense of dependence on his swift wit and also because it's easier, though not nearly always wiser, to meet trouble half-way than to sit and wait for it.

⁂

WE RAN out through a side door into a garden and followed a wall fronting on the road. At the far end was a rambling old barn-like building that nearly faced the Governorate. We entered that by climbing the wall at the end of the garden and in another minute were lying on the roof overlooking the crowd.

"Good Lord!" said Grim. "They've got the Chief Rabbi with them! It's all up to young Crep now!"

To say they "had" the Rabbi was to state it very mildly. They had dragged him by the beard and driven him with blows. They held him now in their midst, bruised and terrified, while thirty or forty young Jews and one pathetically brave policeman strove to force their way through the crowd and rescue him—all yelling at the top of their lungs and being yelled at.

When de Crespigny came to the gate at last he was not smiling. I think that boy could have smiled in the face of torturers, for he had the priceless gift of self-control and an inborn faith in the value of a grin. But, as he said afterward, crowds vary; sometimes it pays to laugh at them, but at others the suggestion of a smile will goad them into fury. The man who smiled at that crowd would probably have paid for the indiscretion with his life.

As he reached the gate they thrust the Rabbi forward to confront him; but if the Jew deduced from that that he was going to get first word in he was wildly wide of the mark. Ten Arabs, holding the old man by the clothing, foaming at the mouth with emphasis and gesticulating like fish-wives, denounced him to the governor all together, while the crowd tossed in reminders and the Jews on the outskirts shrilled rejoinders. You couldn't make head or tail of it, except that they were threatening de Crespigny. And as everybody talked at once he couldn't understand them either.

"Touch and go!" said Grim to me. "Crep's got the wind up! Lord send he keeps his head!"

De Crespigny watched his chance and then picked out the noisiest, most violent man to do the talking—a very wise move that, for it let off steam.

"Now," he demanded, "what is it?"

"This cursed Jew is a thing they call a Rabbi. He is their leader. He should die. He has defied us and says you will protect him. The Sheikh of the Mosque of Er-Rahman had a vision concerning the fire-gift. It was stolen by thieves for use against the Jews, so the Jews are to return it or be slain! We went to this Rabbi to tell him what he must do tonight, and to make arrangements; but the father of lies swore he knew nothing about it and, what is more, would do nothing!"

"Nothing! I know nothing, nothing! What do I know of any fire-gift?" said the Rabbi.

"Perhaps he doesn't!" said de Crespigny.

"He lies! He does! One was released from the jail this morning, who says he knows the thieves no longer have the fire-gift. So the Jews must have it! Who else?"

"Kill the liar! Kill him!" yelled the rear ranks that were close enough to hear.

De Crespigny looked up, for inspiration probably, and caught sight of Grim's face peering over the roof. Grim nodded violently, that being the only available signal for "go ahead." De Crespigny seemed to understand, and smiled at last.

"I know a way to persuade the Jews," he said. "They no doubt have the fire-gift and they shall return it tonight. Leave the Rabbi and his friends here. I'll see justice done!"

"Good boy!" Grim muttered. "That young Crep has gall and guts. Couldn't be better! Now we've got the Rabbi with the wind up where he can't talk back and can't refuse! Oh, good!"

CHAPTER IX

"I am Rabbi, not governor!"

CROWDS in those latitudes gather and disperse as suddenly as storms and like the storms, leave a change of atmosphere behind them. In a sense they resemble waterspouts, destructive as the very devil if allowed to boil along unchecked—always fooling themselves that they are doing good, and hiding their real motive from themselves under a noisy pretense of moral purpose. And they can be handled in much the same way as a waterspout, with pretty much the same result. If you can sever the nexus, as it were, between the clouds and the sea—remove the connecting link between a mob and its desire—all's calm again; or, if not calm, then at any rate much safer. There are typhoons, too, that have to be ridden out.

The nexus in this instance was the Jews and the underlying motive, loot. Ever since the heel of the Turk had been lifted the Moslems of Hebron had been aching to loot somebody. Turkish governor after governor had wrung from them in fines and taxes every piastre that he could and given nothing at all in return for it. So they were poor; and if the Jews weren't rich, they were supposed to be.

Not even the Hebron crowd that prides itself on thieving, will lay plans to loot a whole quarter of the town and cut three thousand throats without establishing a moral issue first to stalk behind. All humans act that way in the mass and if Hebron is not thoroughly human it is nothing. So old Ali Baba and his fire-gift had come, like many another apparent miracle, in the nick of time to salve the public conscience.

I never found out just to what extent Ali Baba had been opportunist. He may have planned the whole thing with a view to looting; but I think not. I think he only boasted of having planned it, after receiving instruction in the cave from that Egyptian devil; for Ali Baba and all his sixteen sons and grandsons were too childish and direct to have thought the thing out in the first instance. It takes Egypt to invent such a dark scheme.

But whoever invented it, Grim saw through it. He knew Hebron too intimately not to be sure that the Jews would be in deadly danger whenever any sort of uprising occurred anywhere in southern Palestine. Given loyal troops enough, any one can suppress a mob; but the trouble had come at a moment when all the troops were occupied elsewhere, so the solution demanded genius. And genius is always simple, although it has a way of seeming subtly baffling to the onlooker.

It would be absurd to pretend that I, or any one but Grim himself, saw until afterward the thin thread of principle he followed to the final solution. But you can see it now. He established a clear issue. Without once showing his own hand, he pinned the Moslems down to a definite claim against the Jews.

All that remained after that was to get the Jews to pay the claim. Even a fanatically angry mob that receives what it demands needs time in which to formulate a new cause; and time meant the arrival of Sikhs and their machine guns.

But the Jews of Hebron are a cagey, self-reliant and suspicious crew. Any one who had survived among Moslems under Turkish rule in that place would have to be. They no more trusted Grim and de Crespigny than Aaron Cohen, whom they despised as a renegade; and to get them to see the point and play Grim's game until troops should come was about as easy as getting Scottish Highlanders to invest in foreign loans.

The crowd dispersed sulkily, shepherded by the lone policeman gamely parading his authority, and leaving the Rabbi and his friends in the Governorate, where they crowded the hall full and noisily abused de Crespigny for having permitted their Chief Rabbi to be outraged. They seemed to think, or pretended to think that the whole affair was his sole fault, and that he could restore order in a minute if he chose to.

We went and fetched Cohen from the hospital and thrust our way through their midst into the sitting-room, where Grim sent for the Rabbi at once. He refused to come in alone, but brought three friends with him, so we made a party of eight, facing one another across the table; and the din in the hall was so prodigious that whoever spoke had to bellow in order to be heard. Have you ever noticed how the need to shout at a man makes for rising temper? There was not much love lost at that session.

The Rabbi began by refusing point-blank to have anything to do with the fire-gift. He consulted his friends in Spanish, which none of us could understand and they agreed with him. You would have thought we were asking for a loan of money on poor security to see the look of scandalized disapproval on their faces.

Asked by de Crespigny why he should refuse to countenance a plan that had been devised for the safety of himself and his people, the Rabbi answered that he had nothing to do with politics and refused to interfere.

"Suppose we were to refuse to interfere and just let you get massacred?" de Crespigny retorted.

"But that is your business!" said the Rabbi. "You are the governor. You receive a salary to keep the peace. I am Rabbi, not governor!"

"Have you any alternative suggestion?" de Crespigny asked him.

"Give us rifles! We will defend ourselves."

"In the first place," said de Crespigny, "I haven't them."

The Rabbi looked utterly incredulous.

"There's one each here for the police and the jailer, two or three revolvers and a pistol. That's all. There's hardly any ammunition. What other suggestion can you make?"

Grim was sitting back watching faces. I don't know whether he had a solution in mind or not; it looked like an *impasse*. The Rabbi turned and talked in Spanish with his friends.

"It is your business," he said at last in Arabic. "We are not able to do anything. If we are attacked, we shall defend ourselves to the last. If you wish to prevent a massacre you should send for Sikhs."

"There's no knowing when the Sikhs can get here," said de Crespigny. "You're asked to help us gain time by pretending to return that fire-gift to the tomb of Abraham. Surely that's not much?"

"Ah! It will be said afterward that we took liberties with the Moslem religion. It will only be a further excuse for a massacre."

We must have made a strange picture arguing the point over that table with its near-art cover and the flowers between us crammed into two brass cartridge cases that the Germans had left behind. De Crespigny and Cohen were the only men in modern costume. The Rabbi and his friends were dressed pretty much as the Pharisees were in Bible days, and bearded in keeping with it. Their faces wore the ivory pallor that comes of ghetto life, and were blanched beneath it with fear that has already passed through all the panic stages and is obstinate at last. They were minded to commit themselves to nothing, those men; sceptical of all promises; incredulous of any man's good-will.

De Crespigny began to lose his temper. It is bad enough at twenty-six to have the lives of thousands on your hands, without being regarded as an enemy by the men you are trying to save.

"—— you, Rabbi! Don't you see that your refusal means a death sentence for us all?"

"Tch-tch! I sentence no one! I am not responsible for this. I will take no part in it!"

De Crespigny glanced at Grim hopelessly.

"I pass, Grim. Can you say anything?"

Grim nodded.

"Cut loose, Cohen. Tell 'em your views."

I don't know whether Cohen took Grim by surprize or not. He surely astonished the rest of us. I've never seen a man handle a meeting with half such passionate wrath. He grew suddenly red in the face as if he could command his rage to order; stood up; threw off his jacket on the floor; rolled up his shirt sleeves, and sat down again. Then he brought his fist down on the table with a crash that upset both vases and, as Grim had suggested that he should, cut loose.

Arabic was the speech he used, with occasional bursts of English when expletives failed him; and he reeled off a list of the faults of the ancient Jewish race with a completeness and fervor that would start a riot if set down in print.

"You old moss-backs!" he fairly yelled at last. "You silly old suckers! You think I care, perhaps, if you all get your throats cut! Guess again! You're dummies, that's what you are! Marionettes! You're goin' to be used! Who's goin' to use you? Me! Yours truly!"

Then back into Arabic again, reeling out abuse until he gasped for breath.

"Gimme a drink, some one! Now, you left-overs, listen to me! You haven't a word to say! You'll do izzactly as you're told! This plan's all thought out, an' you'll fall in with it! That fire goes back tonight—see? I'm the feller that takes it back—I take the risk, too! I'll show you—watch!"

He sprang to his feet again and stripped himself naked to the waist; then seized the lamp on the side-board, jerked out the wick arrangement, poured kerosene into his hand and rubbed it on his stomach. Next he struck a match and set it alight.

"There! That's what!"

He smothered the fire with his hands again.

"Tonight I go to the Ghetto. Ali Baba breathes on me and I burn like the Fourth o' July. I'm a Jew, and you'll acknowledge me! Two hundred Sephardim will come along behind me in procession to the tomb of Abraham, chantin' hymns, an' doin' it all in first-class style, or I'll take the fire an' throw it in your face, and tell the Moslems to go get it from you! D'you believe me? So help me ——, I'll do it!"

"And that would be the end of every living Jew in El-Kalil," said Grim, quietly approving.

"You are a bad man to talk that way!" the Rabbi objected.

"Bad man? Sure, I'm a —— of a bad man! Throwin' fire in fellers' faces is meat to me! D'ye see this young officer here? He's a decent feller. D'ye see these others? They're friends o' mine—bad men—bad as me—worse! D'ye think I'm goin' to stand by an' see them get their throats cut without makin' sure that you goody-goodies get yours first? Huh! If there's goin' to be a massacre tonight it starts in the Ghetto, an' the Rabbi is goin' to be number one for the knife! So suit yourselves, only make your minds up quick!"

"We shall stay here—here in this place!" the Rabbi announced suddenly

"Not you! I'm goin' to kick you out into the street five minutes from now!"

"The governor must protect us!"

"Must he? You try him! Here he is listenin' to what I say! I happen to know izzactly what he'll do; soon as I've kicked you out, he'll call for his cops to chase you down to the Ghetto where you belong! No; you've got your last chance; take or leave it! Who's got a watch? Clock 'em, some one. Give 'em three minutes to decide!"

Grim pulled out Cohen's own gold watch that had been the means of introducing him to all the trouble and laid it on the table ostentatiously, face upward.

"Time starts now!" he announced.

Cohen proceeded to put his shirt on, as if he always made a point of doing that before committing acts of violence; he looked something like a gladiator fitting on his mail—a muscled, beefy man, perfectly able to carry out his threat.

The Rabbi looked imploringly at de Crespigny for any sign of weakness, but was met by a smile whose enigmatic corners suggested anything but that. He tried to consult with his friends, but they thrust back the responsibility on him with shrugging shoulders and something vague about making complaint to Jerusalem later on.

"Thirty seconds more!" announced Grim and Cohen started for the door to open it.

"It is a scandal; but you compel me!" said the Rabbi, throwing up both hands, palms upward.

"Compel nothing!" Cohen retorted hotly. "You choose!"

"I have no choice. I am in the hands of determined men; what can I do?"

"Do you agree to the proposal?" asked de Crespigny.

"I must!"

"No side-stepping!" said Grim. "We want a definite affirmative. Will you or won't you?"

"Very well, I will. But there should be a writing—something in writing to prove afterwards that I am not responsible. This is none of my doing. I must not interfere with Moslem prejudices. I can not accept the blame for it. You must absolve me."

Grim's eyes met de Crespigny's curiously across the table.

"How about it, Crep? If the old bird wants to be nasty afterward they may have to make an official goat of some one."

"Oh, what's the odds? I'll sign it."

"Don't you!" broke in Cohen. "I'm the guy that forced him. Let me sign it! No reason why you should lose your job for this. The worst they can do to me is fire me out of the country. Come on, write him out a paper and I'll sign it."

"You're a good scout, Aaron," Grim answered, "but we won't let you do it all. Rabbi, you write your own acquittal and I'll put my name on it. I'm responsible for this."

CHAPTER X

"We must score the last trick with the deuce of spades!"

COHEN took charge of the training of the Rabbi and his men; not that they would not have preferred almost any one else, for their scorn of him was marrow-deep. He had a certain amount of kindly feeling for them; they none for him whatever. Those timid old last-ditch conservatives had clung to their orthodoxy in the face of worse calamity than Cohen had ever dreamed of; and the pride that accompanies all conservatism had fossilized their humanity to a point where almost nothing mattered except form and ritual.

Most of them traced descent to ancestors who had been driven from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella and so added to a natural pride of race and creed an unnatural, exotic arrogance copied from the Dons.

But Cohen was for that very reason exactly the man to handle them. He had just enough sympathy to understand them and know what verbal shafts would surest sting them into obedience. He knew enough to threaten—too much to strike; to mock their pride and yet play up to it. And his business brain was working; he had grasped the extent of the possibilities and was keener now on making the most of the situation than on saving his own skin and ours.

I suspect that at the back of that bull-necked head of his he already had a scheme for making money out of the adventure somehow; if so, I am equally sure he abandoned it afterward, because, although a man of his parts might build up a business with the Hebron *suk*, the same amount of energy and intrigue expended elsewhere would bring at least ten-fold return But he went at the training of those "Orthodoxies," as he called them, with the zeal of a man who sees money at the other end.

That left Grim free for equally important things and he took them in proper order.

"Crep," he said, "will you be a good fellow and go to the Mosque—don't send, go yourself—and bring the Sheikh here. I'm going to curl up and sleep until he comes."

"All right. In a hurry to see him?"

"No. My guess is that the more parading about the city you do the better. You and Jonesy and the Sheikh might do worse than interview the notables. Get the crowd so keen on tonight's show that they'll have no time to think of much else. Time's the main thing, remember. We must gain time. Every minute of delay brings the arrival of the Sikhs a minute nearer. Better time the affair for ten o'clock. That may mean that some of 'em'll be too sleepy afterward to care for anything but bed. Dawn may see the Sikhs on the road. Bring the Sheikh here when you're good and ready—any time before dark will do. But for the love of Mike, Crep, don't tell him who I am—yet!"

"Your name means something in this place."

"Maybe. But if he learns in advance that I've been in his mosque in disguise with a Jew and another American he'll get rabies! Afterward it won't matter; we'll have the goods on him afterward! You keep up the fake about my being a messenger from Seyyed Omar of El-Kudz, or we'll have the whole nest of wasps about our ears yet!"

So de Crespigny rode horseback into the city, acting on the well-established principle that however clumsy and inconvenient the horse might be in narrow streets, the man on his back looks like personified authority and commands more respect from the crowd than a man on foot.

That is particularly true in the case of Arabs, who think more of a man on a horse than in a motor-car. No mechanical appliance less than a machine gun makes much impression on their minds; the gun means power; the horse means dignity; most other modern trappings either excite cupidity or else contempt.

Grim curled up like a dog and slept on the window-seat as soon as de Crespigny had gone—unconscious almost the moment that he closed his eyes. That trick of sleeping like an animal whenever you so choose is only a forgotten gift; most men can pick it up again, like the sense of smell, that belongs to men as much as to the beasts and is far more valuable, really, than sight or hearing.

A deaf and blind man can still smell his way along, and know more of his surroundings than the ordinary man with eyes and ears intact, who hardly uses them. And as for that trick of sleep, it makes you independent of the clock and furlongs in the race ahead of others, who have to go to bed at stated intervals. It is one of the great good things that living in towns has stolen from us.

But Grim was not destined to sleep long. At the end of about an hour Jones came in looking worried and sat down to write a letter to his girl in England. That was hardly a good symptom. Grim came out of his sleep one eye at a time, the way a dog does exactly, without apparent cause, and lay still for about two minutes watching Jones' back.

"What's wrong, Jonesy?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, you awake? We've a chance left—one! You couldn't get much for it!"

"What's happened?"

"News from Jerusalem. A couple of men got through on foot with word that the Moslems there have been pretty thoroughly suppressed. They say the administrator has taken the part of the Jews and the Jews are crowing about it. So they cornered Crep in the city and demanded permission to march on Jerusalem and help their coreligionists. He refused, of course; and they don't want to miss tonight's show—they'll wait for that. We'd better spin it out, because as soon as it's over they're going to put us out of business and cut loose!"

"But hasn't Crep got a pledge from the head-men?"

"Sure. They'll stand by that. They say that if the Jews of this place bring back the fire-gift tonight as promised they'll spare them. But they haven't made any promise to spare us and they're going to blot out the Jerusalem Jews whether we like it or not. They won't believe there are no rifles in the Governorate, so they're coming here first—soon as the show's over!"

"What's Crep doing now?"

"Arresting a few of the noisiest ones. I brought along half a dozen and left them in the jail. I'm going back there now to stand by and stiffen the jail-guard. So long, in case my number's up!"

He went out again, examining his revolver and Grim got off the window-seat to pace the floor a time or two.

"Maybe I'd better send you," he said. "It's thirty miles. D'you think you could reach Jerusalem on foot by midnight?"

"What's the matter with a camel?"

"You'd be held up. You're all right until the camel hits a good sharp clip; after that they'd spot you for a white man from a mile away. You'll have to walk in that disguise, and take your chance with the sentries outside Jerusalem."

"Ask for Sikhs, I suppose?"

"Yes. Sorry to have to do it. 'Fraid we must. I'd hoped to help these boys pull through without squealing. Do 'em both good with the Administration. Having to yell for help means they'll get no credit for all that's gone before. ——! I hate to do it."

So did I hate it. Setting aside the mere physical exertion of the thirty-mile run, with a good chance of getting knifed or potted on the way and an even better one of being "spiked" by a British sentry in the dark under Jerusalem's walls, I did not want to miss the big event.

"If I get mine on the road," I objected, "you'll be no better off than you were before."

"No. But you'll have done your best along with the rest of us."

You couldn't answer that. I pulled my boots off, to put soap on my socks.

"Better give me some grub in a handkerchief and lend me a gun, then."

"Sure."

But he did nothing about it. He was pacing the floor again, thinking.

"No!" he said suddenly. "Two of Ali Baba's men must make the trip. If one gets scuppered, the other may get through. I'll give them two identical letters. They'll hate to do it, but I can talk the old man round and they'll obey him. But it's rotten having to squeal after all this! ——! I hate it! Jiminy! No! Wait! By gorry, man; I'll be durned if I won't try that first!"

"Try what?"

But one of a dozen things you can never make Grim do is talk over the details of a plan that is only half-formed in his mind. He quit pacing the floor, and went and squatted Arab-fashion on the window-seat again.

I DID not get a glimmer of what he intended until half an hour later de Crespigny came in, bringing the Sheikh of the mosque with him. Grim gave the Sheikh the window-seat and took the darker corner for himself; taking the hint I squatted in the curtained alcove leading to the hall, where I might be presumed to be door-keeper and could overhear without being too much seen.

Grim began by asking the Sheikh what arrangements he had made for the night and listened gravely, making no comment.

"Do you think the whole plan is good?" he asked at last.

"Allah! It is your plan! How should you ask that?"

"I propose to call it off!" said Grim and even de Crespigny gasped.

"*Ma bisir abadan!* * Call it off now, after I have stood up in the mosque before all the people and told of a vision and persuaded them and all? How can you call it off? They will simply massacre the Jews!"

"No. It seems to me it would be simpler after all to tell the truth about it."

"Who will believe you?"

"Every one! I have the man who invented the whole trick as well as those who carried it out. They are all Moslems. I propose to tell the people quite simply that the whole thing was a trick, with you a party to it. I can go and talk to them when they gather before the mosque tonight. They might kill the Jews then, afterward, but attend to you first!"

"And you! They would kill you too!"

"Perhaps. But why me? I don't think that in the circumstances they would kill a British officer, who had exposed you for playing tricks on them!"

"A British officer? I don't understand."

"I'm a British officer."

"You?"

"Sure. Used to be Governor of Hebron. Grim's my name. I'm better known as Jimgrim."

"Hah! Then that is simple! Denounce me tonight. *Taib!* I will denounce you for having entered the mosque by a trick. I will denounce you for sacrilege!"

"All right. Then they'll kill us both."

"But what good will that do you, Jimgrim?"

"No good."

"Nor me either!" The Sheikh laughed like a man who believes he is conversing with a lunatic.

"If you don't want to be exposed tonight," said Grim, "you'd better offer to make terms."

"Terms about what?"

"You know as well as I do that the mob is planning to attack this Governorate after tonight's ceremony, kill everybody in it, plunder it of arms and march on Jerusalem."

"I can do nothing about that."

"Yes you can."

"Allah!"

"You can think up some way of keeping the crowd idle until morning."

"I? They will not listen to me outside the mosque."

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*That will never do.

"All right. Talk to 'em inside the mosque."

"I have talked enough. I have already accepted risk enough. My place is enough in danger as it is."

"Can't you have another vision?"

"*Mustahil!* * They have had enough of visions! They are simple people, but determined. They intend to march on Jerusalem to protect their coreligionists before it is too late. Who can stop them?"

"You can. You can hold them until it's too late to make the attempt."

"I? How?"

"You know as well as I do what will happen to them. They'll be met by machine guns outside the walls of Jerusalem and mowed down."

"I can not help that!"

"Yes you can. It's up to you. If that happens it will be on your head! Now, if we're willing to go through with this performance tonight to save your position for you at the mosque, you ought to be willing to go a step further to save that crowd from the machine guns. Never mind about us. Consider the crowd."

"*Ya hain!* † How I regret that I did not denounce those thieves in the first place!"

"Regret's no good! What are you going to do now; that's the point. See here: If you'll—yes, that'll do the trick!—most of the ringleaders will be inside the mosque, for they're a holy lot of rascals!—if you'll get up in the pulpit and give them a long harangue to the effect that your spirit tells you to warn them—to go slow—to be cautious—to wait for the word; and that you'll give 'em the word at the proper minute—you can leave the rest to us; and we'll fix it so that you get credit as a prophet. Will you do that?"

"*Taib.* I will do it. But I doubt that it will do any good."

"All right, that's a bargain, then." Grim turned to the governor. "Crep, old boy, trumps are all out; we must score the last trick with the deuce of spades!"

CHAPTER XI

"Allahu akbar! La illahah il-allah!"

YOU know that feeling at a melodrama of the old sort, when all the villain's plans are prospering and a ghastly death stares the hero in the face; even although some fool has told you the plot in advance, so that you know what the end is going to be, you can't pretend not to be all worked up about it. And most men—and more women—have faced at some time the imminent risk of death, with just one chance of pulling through.

Well, we enjoyed both sensations that night. We were spectators of a play and actors in it, not knowing yet whether it was comedy or tragedy. We hoped we could foresee the end, but weren't at all sure.

"We're betting on the merest guess," said Grim. "We may as well not fool ourselves. Perhaps we can hold the crowd until tomorrow morning. Perhaps not. If we succeed, perhaps the Sikhs will come. We're betting they'll come. If they do, good; Crep and Jonesy 'll be slated for promotion. If they don't, we'll none of us need rations ever any more, amen! Let's go."

It was about nine o'clock—no moon—and the roar of El-Kalil was like the voice of a long tunnel full of railway trains, made all the more unholy by utter darkness. After a long consultation de Crespigny had left two policemen on guard at the jail and taken the other eight with him.

The lonely little one-horse plan finally decided on, as the best possible in the event of an outbreak, was for de Crespigny and his eight police to fight their way to the jail, gather up the two guards, the jailer and his assistant, leave the jail and prisoners to the mob, and fall back on the Governorate. The rest of us were to join de Crespigny if we could and Doctor Cameron and the nurse were to take their chance of being unmolested at the hospital, seeing that neither of them would hear of any other course.

It was decided that to make a last stand at the hospital, supposing we could ever reach it, would only seal the fate of two people whom the mob might otherwise treat as noncombatants.

De Crespigny had ridden off, with his eight policemen tramping stolidly behind him, awfully afraid, yet proud as Lucifer to be the bodyguard of Law where no law would be otherwise, and encouraged by the sight of his brave young back bolt-upright in the saddle. A man's back often tells a truer story than his face.

Grim and I went on foot—to the Ghetto first, leaving Jones alone in the Governorate for somebody had to hold headquarters, and the joyless job is the junior's by right of precedent. Grim had a word to say to the jail-guards on the way and we reached without incident the narrowing gut where the street passes into the city by a fragment of the ancient wall.

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*Impossible.

†Oh, the pity of it!

From that point onward it was one long struggle to force a way through the crowd. All Hebron was out, trying to win to the Ghetto gate and see the preliminaries. There was not room in the street for seven men to stand abreast, nor space by the Ghetto for a crowd of fifty; yet several thousand men were milling and crushing for a front view, like long-horn steers that smell water—and all in the dark. You couldn't see the face of a man three paces off.

We soon got jammed up hopelessly and only contrived to keep together by clinging and wrestling. The hilt of a man's sword took me under the ribs and pressed until I nearly yelled aloud with agony. I trod on his instep to give him a different sense of direction and if he could have drawn the sword I should have learned the feel of its sharper end. He started an argument, spitting out the savage abuse within six inches of my face and I did not dare answer him for fear of betraying myself with an obviously foreign accent. Grim saved that situation by a trick as old as Hebron is—a trick that has saved armies before now.

He started to sing, choosing the lilting air the Hebron men love most, and making up the words to it, as nearly every singer does in that town of surviving customs.

"Oh, fortunate and famous are the men of El-Kalil!
  Allah watches them! Oh, Allah watches them!
They are gallant to the stranger, to the stranger in the gates!
  Allah watches them! Oh, Allah watches them!"

They caught the refrain and throat after throat took it up, beginning to sway a little in time to it and ceasing from the cattle-thrust all in one direction that was pinning them choked and helpless between walls. The man who wanted my blood laughed and began to sing too.

"Hither came Er-Rahman*, hither across deserts, hither to make friendship with the men of El-Kalil!"
  "Allah watches them! Oh, Allah watches them!"
"None else had befriended him. None had housed the stranger. Wondering he wandered to the tents of El-Kalil!"
  "Allah watches them! Oh, Allah watches them!"

Now the whole street was thundering the refrain and a rival singer took up the story of Abraham, for rivalry is keen among the bards of that place and no "sweet singer" lets a new man hold attention long if he can help it. And because the men of El-Kalil, like those of other cities, have their own moods and their own expressions of emotion they began to form groups and face inward, little by little easing the forward pressure as the men in the rear made room to sway and swing in time to the improvised ballad.

Grim did not waste time then. He grabbed me by the arm and hauled me into a doorway, kicked on the door until a woman opened and then without a word of explanation rushed past her up a rickety old stair-way to the roof. We were followed by a dozen men before she could get the door closed again and whether Grim knew the way or not they showed it to us—up over roof after roof—flat ones, domed ones, —along copings—jumping here and there across dark ditches that were Hebron "streets" and frequently scaring women off the roofs in front of us—pursued all the way by the thunder of the song Grim started.

"Allah watches them! Oh! Allah watches them!"

You could have recognized the Ghetto by the change of smells. But there was a glow of light there too, and rival music snarling from somewhere out of sight, tinny and thin but carrying its theme through endless bars instead of pausing to repeat, as Arab music does.

WE LAY at the end of a roof and looked over—down on a sight so weird that the modern world and all that belonged to it became a dream forthwith. Not that this looked real; there was nothing real any longer. Life was a myth. We were dreamers, peering down into the vale of dreams.

Have you ever seen the ancient Jewish costume? Purple and apricot-color—ancient Jews in turbans, with their long, curled earlocks, and the gestures that signify race-consciousness refusing not to be expressed? And the Jewish boys, togged out like their sires, gawky and awkward in the ancient costume, full of all the fiery zeal of their race and not yet trained to self-suppression?

It was a courtyard below us, connected to the street by that dark passage we had entered the evening before. The passage was still as black as pitch, but open windows facing on the court bathed that in golden-yellow light. Framed in the windows there were Jewesses—Esthers, Rachels, Rebeccas—crowding for a front view, bejeweled with long gold ear-rings, open-mouthed, afraid—gleaming-eyed women.

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*Abraham.

There was a committee of Arabs, thirty or forty strong, armed to the teeth, standing back to the wall around two sides of the court, eyeing the whole scene with owlish attention to detail. Back to the entrance of the passageway stood Ali Baba, with his sixteen sons behind him in a semi-circle; and behind them again, dimly discernible in shadow was an old *muballir* chanting nasally from a copy of the Koran held with both hands on his lap. The Jewish music, out of the darkness in the corner opposite was presumably by way of opposition to that heresy.

The most striking figure of them all was Cohen, standing in the midst, facing Ali Baba, with the Chief Rabbi on his right hand and another on his left. He wore a turban, to which false ringlets had been pinned and was nearly naked to the waist, his skin gleaming in the mellow light.

They had togged him out like an Orthodox Jew, but there was a girdle about his waist and all the upper part of his clothing hung down from that, so that he looked like a butcher about to slay according to ancient ritual.

The armed Arabs began to grow impatient and two or three of them called out, but I could not catch what was said. The cry was taken up by the younger Jews behind and without waiting for the *muballir* to finish chanting Ali Baba stepped up to Cohen and breathed fire on him.

Instantly the whole of Cohen's torso seemed to leap into flame—blue flame, of the sort that dances on a Christmas pudding—flame that crawled snake-fashion, changing shape to disappear in one place and appear in another. The Arabs roared delight; the women shrilled in the windows, and the young Jews at the rear set up a dog-fight din that might have meant anything.

Cohen took something in his hands—a sponge it might have been—pressed it to his breast, and that, too, caught fire. The flame died down on his body and flickered out, but the thing in his hands burned on. Ali Baba bowed to the ground in front of it, all his sons following suit; then the sons made way down their midst for him and turned behind him four abreast as he started for the street. The band of Jew musicians struck up a lively air with cymbals, and Cohen started after them, followed by two Rabbis and at least two hundred other Jews, all chanting, while the Arabs waited to come last, flashing their swords in air and yelling in praise of Allah.

The last I saw of the procession just then was a ball of fire in the black passage that rose and fell as Cohen tossed it and the weird sheen on his arms and breast as the blue light flashed on them.

"Let's go!" said Grim and we crossed by an arch above a dark street that was all one voice of roaring men, who milled and mobbed to get out of the way of the fire-gift, urged to it by men on wiry gray ponies who pricked at them with spear-tips and cursed in the name of the Most High. The Jewish music penetrated through and above the din like the wail of forgotten ages; but every minute or so every other sound was suddenly drowned beneath the Moslem roar that answers all arguments, confounds all doubters, satisfies all requirements.

"*Allahu akbar! La illahah il-allah!* God is great. There is no god but God!"

We got down into a side street by a wall and set of steps and ran in a circuit to head off the crowd. But it was useless to try to reach the mosque by the south entrance, for every available inch of footing along the route was crammed with men, who sang in groups, each group with a soloist making up songs for them and all thundering the refrains, so that the winding, dark street-cañons were one interminable roar. And there was a reek of human sweat you could have leaned against.

But there was an old minaret, disused because unsafe, that overlooked the whole of the Haram court, and whose good, stout olive-wood door, hinged like a treasure-chest, was only fastened by a cheap brass Brummagem padlock.

Grim broke that with the first rock handy and we climbed the stone stairs that rocked now and then in their setting, scaring out bats that like to haunt disused buildings. We emerged on a rickety platform, whose broken iron railing hung loose above a sea of heads.

The whole Haram court was chock-a-block with men. You could see de Crespigny's horse nodding and champing nervously outside in the street,where one of the policemen held him. The rest of the police were up beside de Crespigny on the mosque steps behind the Sheikh, whose gaunt, Old Testament face was a picture of mingled dignity and nervousness.

On the steps below the Sheikh, but leaving a narrow gangway for him, were about twenty notables; and there was a narrow cleared space, two men wide perhaps, leading all the way from them to the South Gate. There was plenty of light on the scene; for, besides the great iron bracket-lanterns, many of the men had kerosene lanterns, swung on sticks to keep them safe above the struggling crowd.

We were none too soon. The circuit we had made had used up time. We could hear the cymbals already, and the chanting penetrating through the roar from Moslem throats. In another minute I caught sight of a dancing ball of blue fire; and then, through a wide gap between two roofs I saw Cohen.

He said afterwards that he was in deadly fear all the while, but I believe he was enjoying himself. At intervals between tossing the fire and catching it he would bathe his arms in it, and wave them, blazing blue, until the crowd gasped. And he looked as solemn as if he had been born to the trade of making miracles.

Ali Baba and his gang of sixteen thieves marched on ahead of him with all the righteous dignity of men who have given back what they might not keep—there is no higher sanctity than that in El-Kalil—and, swinging to the left at the sharp turn by the gate, marched through like old-time priests, forming two abreast, now, because of the narrow passage. They came up the enormous entrance steps and paraded, dignified and solemn, straight up to the Sheikh, where Ali Baba bowed very low and said something—I couldn't hear what, though the crowd inside the Haram was absolutely still by that time.

But Cohen did not dare go past the seventh entrance step from the bottom, where a hole in the wall is, that they say—in order to pacify the Jews—connects like a whispering tube with the tomb of Abraham a hundred yards away beneath. No Jew dare go past that seventh step on pain of death. He stood on it and tossed the fire, while Ali Baba did the heralding and the music of the Jews outside blended with a roar of excited voices. Then Ali Baba started back to carry the fire to the mosque, since no Jew must come nearer and Grim caught hold of my arm.

"We'll miss the big scene if we stay here. Come!"

Down these rickety steps we went again among the bats and bugs, hurrying all the faster because of the risk of falling masonry—clambered by a lean-to up on to the same wide-topped wall that had stood us in good stead the night before—ran along it to the end, unchallenged for two reasons: we were up in shadow above the dancing lights, and the crowd was intoxicated with the sight of something else. The fire-gift was in Ali Baba's hands now, being carried up the narrow path between them all.

At the end of the wall we slid down a buttress and passed into the mosque through the Sheikh's own private door. But there we were nonplused for the moment. You could have walked on the heads of men who sat, all facing away from us in the direction of the south door, where the Sheikh was welcoming the fire-gift—a level, multi-colored lake of heads.

No one noticed us. We slipped along the wall as far as the pulpit. The little wooden door at the foot of it was hanging on the latch and we slipped through unseen, to stand in deep shadow on the upper steps with a view of every square foot of all that great mosque.

AT THE far end, not thirty feet from the southern door, is a little arched recess in the wall with an ornamental brass lamp hanging in it. Beneath the lamp is a perfectly round hole that leads through the solid black rock to the cave beneath. The hole is about twelve inches in diameter and the Moslems kneel and pray through it to Father Abraham, and drop little messages down to him written on slips of paper. There was a space kept clear around that hole and a gangway from it to the door.

Up that gangway presently, preceded by the Sheikh, came Ali Baba carrying the fire, shaking it to make the flame burn fiercely, and the roar that God is Great went up into the mosque roof from the throats of the seated throng by way of greeting. The Sheikh stopped at the hole and turned to face the congregation.

"Behold!" he cried out. "Before the eyes of all of you that which was taken is returned!"

At that Ali Baba—rather lingering, as if he hated to be parted from his treasure—dropped the blue fire down the hole and for about a minute nothing happened, while the congregation watched in utter silence. Then however the ten or twenty thousand little slips of paper on the cave floor caught alight and a column of blue-gray smoke emerged like the jinnee out of the fisherman's jar in the Arabian Nights' tale—formed a great query mark in mid-air—and rose leisurely to mushroom and spread against the roof.

That was a true miracle if ever men sat and saw one. The congregation moaned like the wind in a forest, swaying their bodies and murmuring that God is great. Ali Baba went out by the south door, minded, I expect, to tell the crowd outside what marvels had been seen to happen. And the Sheikh, minded too, to make the most of things while the impression was still at its height, began to thread his way toward the pulpit.

"We'd better beat it quick!" said Grim and to save time we vaulted over the pulpit-rail into the utter darkness between the back wall and the door we entered by. There we stayed to hear the Sheikh do what he could to keep the crowd quiet until morning.

But the Sheikh had had a change of heart since Grim last talked with him. Something in his lean, mean face made me suspicious the minute he reached the pulpit and paused to look about him while the congregation faced his way. There was a thin smile and a sneer; and a strange light in his eye.

"My God! He's going back on us!" Grim whispered. But we stayed to listen. I suppose most men would rather hear themselves condemned to death than have the sentence pronounced in their absence.

You could see in a second how the Sheikh had argued it. The miracle had happened. The fire-gift was returned. His own reputation in the community was likely to be stronger now than ever. The only risk to him was that certain men in the secret might betray him, and of those Ali Baba and his sons would obviously keep the secret for their own sake. Why not then, get rid of the handful of white men who were almost sure to talk in clubs and messes? It was easy enough.

"Allah is all-majesty!" he began, and paused while they murmured a response. "Ye have seen. Your eyes have seen. Your ears heard the vision from my lips. Ye know now that these dogs of Jews of El-Kalil are to be spared awhile. But I have yet to see the vision—I have yet to hear the word explaining why the Moslems of Jerusalem should lay their necks beneath the feet of Jews, at the bidding of alien rulers. What says the Book? 'And God drove back the infidels in their wrath; they won no advantage; for God is strong, mighty!' No vision yet has told me why the aliens in this place—are they not few, and ye so many—should stand between you and your faith in an hour when——"

"Here! Let's beat it quick!" said Grim and led the way.

We shinnied up the wall again and down by the lower wall that Grim had used the night before. The same roar was throbbing in the main streets, louder than before if anything; but Grim knew all the byways, and we made for the Governorate with the fear of death dogging our heels, every swell of the tumult sounding in our ears like the beginning of the end and every deep shadow looking like an ambush.

I don't think Grim had anything in mind except to get back to the Governorate. I know I hadn't. The place where a man's friends are, or ought to be, draws him when the hunt begins as his home earth draws the fox. The fact that the Governorate couldn't possibly be defended for ten minutes made no difference; that was home and we ran for it sobbing for breath, I with a stitch in my side like a knife-wound, and Grim lending a hand at intervals to pull me when wind gave out altogether.

And in the end we reached the widening street, where the city leaves off and suburb begins, at almost exactly the same moment as de Crespigny, riding well-content with his eight good, dark-skinned legionaries tramping along behind him.

"What's your hurry?" he asked.

Grim laid a hand on his saddle, fighting for breath to speak with.

"The Sheikh's gone back on us!" he gasped. "He feels he's safe—wants to keep the secret in the family—the swine's advising them to scupper us!"

"All up, eh?" said de Crespigny. "Well, we gave 'em a run for their money! Take a stirrup each and run beside me." He turned to the faithful eight and gave his orders in an unchanged voice:

" 'Tention! Quick march! Double!"

CHAPTER XII

"Let's have supper now and drink to them seventeen thieves!"

WE STOPPED at the jail and brought the guard away, jailers and all, leaving the prisoners to whatever fate awaited them. Most mobs empty the jail first thing, if only for the sake of mischief, but de Crespigny took care that the outer door was locked and bolted.

Cohen arrived in a state of jubilant joy two or three minutes after we reached the Governorate; and then we had a surprize. Ali Baba turned up with his sixteen sons.

"What do you want here?" asked de Crespigny.

"They are coming to kill you officers."

"Well?"

"I and my sons have pledged ourselves to be your friends. Give us guns. We will fight for you until the end comes."

"I've got no guns, O father of true promises."

"*Taib.* We have knives."

There wasn't any comment you could make exactly. De Crespigny shook hands with him and Jones posted them in the hall, where in a free-for-all fight against an invading mob knives could be used to the best advantage.

Cohen disappeared, and came back ten minutes later with the bitterly protesting Scots nurse. He could not have brought her by force, for she was stronger than any two of him, but he had threatened to murder the doctor unless he ordered her away to the Governorate; and the doctor had smiled and given in, saying that the presence of a woman might help the boys. But she was angry. My word, she was angry! And she set about fixing up a first-aid place at once in de Crespigny's bedroom, although I did not see what good that would do if the mob came on in earnest.

And sure enough, they came within the hour, bringing torches with them, roaring up the street like bulls turned loose. They paused before the jail to hold a consultation, but after five minutes of noise decided not to open it; then came on again, singing about the swords of El-Kalil. And because it was dark and you couldn't guess their numbers, it seemed as if the whole East were surging along to swamp and roll over us and surge along forever.

"I'll take mine on the steps with the police," said Jones and went out through the front door, where we heard the breech-bolts clicking as he examined the men's rifles in the window-light.

"Poor old Jonesy's got the wind up badly!" said de Crespigny. "I'll go out to the gate and talk to them. Grim, will you do what you can to hold the place if they scough me?"

He followed Jones out through the door and Grim sent me to the roof with a revolver and orders to use my wits if I had any left. So I saw what took place better than any one did.

De Crespigny mounted the wall and stood this time, for they could not have seen him otherwise, while the mob milled and sang songs at him. You could see their eyes by the light of the lanterns they carried—that and the sheen on swords and knives, nothing more. It was a long time before he could make his voice heard and then they laughed at him, which is a very bad sign among Moslems.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Rifles!"

"I have none."

"Liar! Father of lies! Kill the liar and loot his stores!"

De Crespigny held one hand up for silence and because they were used to giving him a hearing they gave him a last one now.

"Now for your own sakes, don't be fools! You can kill me; that's easy. You can loot the Governorate, although you'll find that tough work and not worth while. Then you can start for Jerusalem; and the Sikhs will meet you on the way! I've done my best for you. If you'll go back to your homes now there shall be no reprisals for this night's work. Go home, and act like sensible men!"

Some one threw a rock at him, but missed and it broke a lower window. They laughed and he held up a hand for silence again. It was then that I heard a row like the grumble of far-off thunder and looking to the right saw a string of swiftly moving lights—very strong lights, one behind the other, heading this way from Jerusalem. That was Sikhs in lorries; it couldn't be anything else. They were coming like a fourth-alarm turn-out to a fire.

A minute later, while de Crespigny was trying to make himself heard above the growing tumult, the men on the crowd's edge heard too, and looked and yelled. Ten minutes later ten great lorries came to a halt in line in an utterly empty street in front of the Governorate, disgorging two machine guns and more hairy Sikhs than you would have believed could be possibly crowded into that space.

The Sikhs were angry. They had been skirmishing for a day and a night without sleep. They wanted nothing on earth so much as a crowd to glut their temper on and stood about outside, grumbling their disappointment. But one enormous man with a beard like the man's on the chutney-bottle in the grocer's window thrust his way into the Governorate, calling aloud for Jimgrim.

"Ah!" he exclaimed at sight of him and came to attention. "Not dead, then, *sahib!* And the man I was to reckon with—that Ali Baba person—where is he?"

Grim introduced them and the eyes of Sikh and Arab met for thirty full seconds. Then Narayan Singh the Sikh grinned hugely and thrust his bayonet forward. Ali Baba answered the threat by touching his knife and pointed to his sixteen sons.

"The more the better!" said Narayan Singh, perfectly ready to accept odds of seventeen to one.

"*Inshallah!*"

"We will see, whenever the time comes!"

"*Inshallah!*" repeated Ali Baba sweetly.

"Lovin' couple, ain't they!" put in Cohen. "Say; don't you fellows ever eat supper in this joint? I'm dyin' o' thirst! What time is it?"

"Ah!" Grim laughed. "That reminds me; here's your watch back. I allow you've won the bet. Where's mine?"

"Gimme mine first."

Grim obeyed and Cohen pocketed the thing.

"Like to kid yourself, don't you! Think I'll part with yours? Nothin' doing! I'll keep this blame thing for a souvenir—souvenir o' the first time I was made a stark starin' sucker out of and wasn't sorry! But say; let's have supper now and drink to them seventeen thieves!"

TOOK TWO SCALPS AT SEVENTY-SIX

by Lewis Appleton Barker

IN 1779, MR. OBED MORGAN, then living at Ricketts' Fort, in what is now West Virginia, had a thrilling encounter with two Indians, whom he met in the woods, and in spite of his advanced years—he being then seventy-six—he came out ahead.

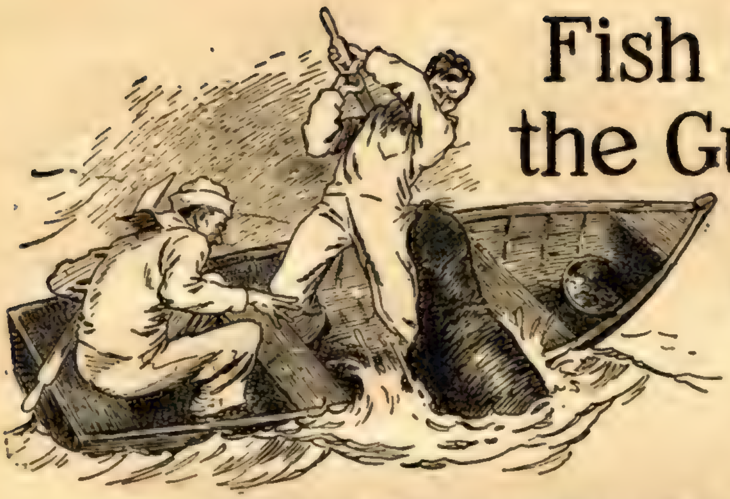
Owing to rheumatism, attendant on old age, the patriarch was easily winded in his first attempt at flight, and ensconced himself behind a large tree. The redskins promptly did likewise; but the borderer, by the ruse of poking his coonskin cap out on his ramrod, induced one of them to expose himself in order to fire, and before he was able to cover himself, shot him through the head.

Again Morgan fled, but the remaining Indian gained on him rapidly, and finally stopped to take aim. He fired, but, missing his man, they closed on each other in a death grip. The white man attempted to brain the other with his gun-stock, and in so doing had a finger cut off by the brave's tomahawk, as well as having his gun knocked from his hands.

Locked in close embrace, back and forth they struggled. Despite the disparity of years, however, Morgan, who had been somewhat of a wrestler in his day, threw his foe, but the greased body of the latter was so slippery that he was quickly uppermost, and reached for his knife. It was a supreme effort on the part of both.

The old man, who had the savage's other hand tightly gripped in his teeth, also endeavored to reach the knife, but the Indian got it first.

Fortunately, however, he was only able to seize it near the blade, and Morgan, catching hold of the upper part of the handle, drew it through his adversary's hand, nearly cutting off his fingers. This caused the latter to spring up, and the brave old settler, still gripping the Indian's other hand in his teeth, plunged the knife in his breast, returning a short time after to the fort with two scalps.



Fish for the Gunner

by CHARLES VICTOR FISCHER

Author of "Up the Pole," "Monk Rides His Luck," etc.

BY ALL our grandmothers used to tell us, "Blackie's" left ear must have been ringing that afternoon. For while Blackie, in a hotel room in Felgo, was unpacking and trying on his new uniform of radio gunner, out on Fog Rock the operators attached to the Navy radio station were tearing Gunner Blackhurst, whoever he might be, to shreds.

Had it been Blackie the bluejacket, who was coming out next day to join the gang, then all hail, more power and welcome, they would have sung to him in chorus. But Blackie was now Mr. Blackhurst, gunner (radio), U. S. N., coming out to assume command; and to him they had a different song to sing. An officer! On a station that had never had any one higher than a chief electrician in charge!

Forty miles dead west, solitary Fog Rock jutted up out of the Pacific. It was a bleak, desolate little island on which were a lighthouse and a wireless station. Everything about that rock was wild: The countless rabbits, that were as numerous as rats along a waterfront; the myriad sea-gulls, that hatched their young up among its inaccessible crevices and ledges; the hordes of sea-lions, that roared and swarmed in and about the many coves of its rocky shores. And but for the happy arrangement that permitted men attached to that station two weeks' furlough out of every eight—that is, six weeks' duty and two weeks' vacation—no doubt they too would have been more or less wild.

That afternoon, however, the wildest living thing on the rock was "Graveyard" Wilton, the chief electrician in charge. Graveyard was raving wild. If he, Graveyard, had any prestige with the gods at all, Gunner Blackhurst faced a period in the dreaded fires reaching into millions of years.

"Fog! Fog!" he growled, after reading the message.

It stated that hereafter the station would be under the direct supervision of an officer; that Gunner Blackhurst had been ordered to take command, and would be out next day. Graveyard had reigned supreme of the Navy gang on the rock for eight years.

"I'll say they gave this rock an appropriate name," he went on, pacing back and forth across the room used for a radio office and a hangout combined. "If there ain't a heavy fog outside, the higher-ups get busy and make fog for us!"

"Goat" Perkins pushed back one phone. He was on watch, and had just received and turned over the message to Graveyard.

"Pretty rich, eh?" he jeered. "We've got to have an officer out here. This navy's gettin' to be a wonderful institution, what? And that means you move, chief. That bungalow of yours goes to the gunner, of course. What'll you do—take the two-by-four dog-house out on the end of the island, or double up with one of us far-downs in the quarters?"

"When they drive me out of that bungalow they drive me off the rock," Graveyard announced grimly. "I'll get off here if I have to go to the President to do it! A gunner!" he spat viciously. "And me scheming to get married next month and bring my wiff to the bungalow. Wouldn't I look nice bringing a wiff out here to live in the dog-house?"

"You don't happen to know this bird Blackhurst, do you?" asked Goat.

"Might if I saw him," was the grumbling reply. "A man remembers mostly by faces and nicknames in the Navy. I suppose I'll remember him from somewhere when I see him. And like all former shipmates that have passed up into the realm of gold-wearers he'll give me to understand that familiarity breeds contempt, and that it might perhaps be better if we forget our former acquaintance. Whoever he is, he's an officer. I can't see how things are going to get any better out here."

"I can't see how they could, chief," said Goat. "You've sure run things so that everybody's been satisfied, and at the same time always got the work done proper."

"That's the bug that bites, Goat. You see, in the long run I'm the dub it all falls on. I've always figured there was only a few of us out here, and sooner than give a man a growl and stir up hard feelings I've let a lot of things slide. But now I'll have to turn around and tighten up.

"And it'll put me in a world all by myself. I'll be between the gunner and the gang; the gang hating me on the one hand because I've suddenly become duty-struck, and the gunner riding me on the other because I'm not duty-struck enough."

"Oh, he may turn out to be nice and democratic-like," said Goat optimistically. "One thing—he'll have to eat with us; that'll tend to kinda bridge the gap between us and him."

"Simple," who had come in during the discussion, and stood reading the message over Graveyard's shoulder, now chimed in:

"Does this mean work all night out in the power-house? Doll everything up?"

"Doll —— up!" Graveyard exploded. "And spoil him right off the bat? Give him the impression that he's running into a cage of monkeys, all breaking our necks to please him?"

"That's a pageful," Goat spoke up. "My suggestion is, everybody go right about their business as usual, just as if there wasn't any gunner coming out at all. Let's you and I take our regular mornin' fishin'-trip. Let's start the gunner off with fish for dinner," he concluded with a grin.

If "Beans," the cook, wanted to get the rock-gang fighting mad, all he had to do was have fish for dinner. They would not eat fish on a bet. Graveyard and Goat went out in a boat fishing every morning, but they gave all the fish they caught to the lighthouse men.

Start him off on fish. The idea pleased Graveyard immensely.

"Boy, you've got a man's head," he responded approvingly.

Then he grew thoughtful for a moment.

"The question is," he finally added, "will Beans be sober enough to cook by tomorrow? Do you know what that rum-hound has done in these last two weeks? He's nearly emptied a five-gallon can of alcohol on me! I'll have to get after him; it's time he came out of it. Either of you seen him today?"

Simple shook a negative.

"Last I seen him," informed Goat, "was when he busted into my room about two o'clock this morning. Woke me up and wanted me to kill a big snake with a devil's head on it he thought was chasing him."

"Tell the first man that sees him to run him over to my shack," ordered Graveyard, who then strode out of the quarters and over to his bungalow.

NO SOONER had Graveyard seated himself than there came a timid knock at his door.

It was Beans, the cook. Beans was a pitiable sight. His eyes and face were bloodshot and bleary; he was disheveled and dirty.

"Nothing doing on the shot," snapped Graveyard. "Every drop of alcohol on this station is under lock and key. And furthermore, you better snap. I'll give you till tomorrow morning at ten o'clock to be straight. If——"

"Now wait a minute, chief," Beans interrupted. "First place, I ain't lookin' for a shot. I told you yesterday I was quittin', didn't I? So I did quit. All I've had in the last twelve hours is eight shots—just enough to keep the animals away."

"You mean just enough to just keep your jag warmed up. Now listen, Beans——"

"Never mind, chief," Beans again cut in. "You listen. I've been asleep down in the boat-house all day. And it's what I heard down there not a half-hour ago that brings me in here. It's more important for you to listen to me than for me to listen to your Billy Sunday stuff."

Graveyard laughed.

"Shoot," he said.

"They were Meullor and 'Dutch'—I knew by their voices," Beans began. "I couldn't see 'em, bein' inside of the boat-house as they passes by. By the sound of their voices they were comin' up from the boat landing.

"I hears Meullor's voice. He says—

"'This'll put Mr. Wilton where he won't worry about my cruelty to animals any more.'

"They stops then, an' one of 'em strikes a match on the boat-house. Then Dutch answers—

"'Yah, und vere he gep nix doodle for vy I sell der sea-gulls' eggs.' Just like that.

"Then they both laughs and passes on. I don't know what they're up to. But you know neither of 'em's got any use for you. You licked Meullor for feedin' live rabbits to the sea-lions; and you reported Dutch for collectin' and sellin' sea-gulls' eggs. They got a job up on you. That's all I came for."

Beans made for the door.

"Wait a minute, Beans," said Graveyard. "I'm certainly glad you heard that, old scout. Stick your hand out."

"In pretty bad shape, eh?" he went on, regarding the trembling hand the other held out. "Now, if you'll be satisfied with just a little I'll help you over the hill with a jolt or two. Not much, because——"

But Beans turned on his heel.

"I told you I quit, didn't I?"

With which he slammed the door.

Graveyard sat and pondered. Meullor and Dutch were two of the lighthouse men with whom Graveyard had been at outs for some time.

He had come upon Meullor one day standing on the brink of Dead Man's Lookout, a high craggy overhang on the south end of the island. Meullor had his hat full of young rabbits, which he was tossing one by one down into the snarling, upturned jaws of a hungry pack of sea-lions, five hundred feet below.

A few words had followed. After that what had happened Meullor could remember but vaguely. A crowding of many events into a very few seconds; a fusillade of fists that made him think he was fighting several men; numerous wild swings and vain attempts to close in and clinch with his lithe, elusive adversary; a sensation of sickly giddiness, as the watery world far below commenced going round and round.

Three times the hard rock had come up and smitten him in the face. The realization had finally burrowed in on him that there was no sense in getting up only to be knocked down again. And so he had stayed down.

Dutch had a different reason for bearing Graveyard a grudge. Dutch had been gathering sea-gulls' eggs, packing them in barrels of sawdust and shipping them in to restaurant owners in Felgo. They passed them off for hens' eggs.

Gathering these eggs was prohibited by law. The sea-gull cleared Felgo Bay of refuse and were thus of incalculable assistance in preventing the spread of disease.

Moreover the gulls themselves made strenuous objection to having their nests robbed. They set up a continuous cackle and caw that at times made sleep on the rock an impossibility. After arguing the point with Dutch and failing to persuade him to discontinue his illicit business, Graveyard had written a report of the affair in to the lighthouse authorities.

After what Beans had told him Graveyard sat for a long time trying to imagine what the two could be up to. Unable to form the slightest conjecture, he thought for a moment of going down to the boat-landing and doing a little detective work. But then a more oppressing worry crept in upon him.

He looked about him. This snugly furnished, cozy little bungalow, that had been his for eight years and that he had anticipated bringing his wife to in another month was, in the snap of some higher-up's fingers, to be taken from him. He, Graveyard, might occupy the "dog-house"—a little two-room hut on the north side of the island.

He grinned a bitter grin. Such was the precarious lot of an enlisted man. More than likely, compared to himself, the officer coming out would be but a rooky in the service. Fourteen years Graveyard had been in the Navy. Eight years he had run the Fog Rock Station. And now some young upstart, quite probably with a lot of theory and no practise in his head, was coming out to assume command; to drive him out; to put an end to his vision of a home.

"WELL—do we fish?" said Goat to Graveyard next morning as they pushed back from the breakfast table. "I've been on watch since midnight, you know. And if we're goin' fishin' we better start pronto, or I'll go to sleep on my pins."

"Yes," responded Graveyard, getting up. "Must get the gunner's fish."

Then to the rest seated about—

"You all understand there's fish for dinner, don't you?"

A chorus of growls followed the two out.

"Since I've had this station," said Graveyard, on the way down to the landing, "there's been just one fellow, out of the hundred or so that have been out here, that liked fish. 'Rummy,' we called him. Big, fine-built, handsome lad, he was. One of the finest kids I've ever had out here—you couldn't help but like him—only for booze.

"Sober, he was a prince. But every so often he'd bust out on a toot and make such a mess of himself that he wouldn't know his own name for weeks at a time. Just like Beans—only a lot worse. Another thing about Rummy—he's the only man who would ever live in the dog-house."

"Must have been phony," Goat replied. "Somethin' wrong with a man who'll live over in that soap-box."

"No. Simply a bookworm. Always studying—when he wasn't boozing. After he'd fight his way out of one of his periodicals he'd get real conscientious. Then for months the only times we'd see him around the station would be at eats, or when he was on watch. Off watch or through chow, he'd hike over to the dog-house and bury his nose in a book."

"But, like fish!" Graveyard continued, as they shoved off in the small, flat-bottomed skiff. "We couldn't feed Rummy enough fish. He'd eat fish three times a day, year around, Sundays and all, if the rest of us would have stood for it."

A few hundred yards from the rock Goat rested on the oars and looked around. The sky was overcast; a chill, hazy grayness hung over the water. But the sea was calm; there was no wind.

"Wonder where all the Felgo fish-gang are this morning," he said. "There ain't a single boat out."

Graveyard swept the horizon. Not a speck was in sight.

"Must be some weather predicted," he said. "Those Greeks always know."

"In which case we better not get too far from the rock. Shall we tie 'er to the bottom here?"

"Oh—no need to anchor," Graveyard answered, glancing quickly toward the rock. "Just pull in the oars. We'll go ahead and fish. Then if we see we're drifting fast we'll drop the pig-iron."

They commenced baiting the lines. Ten hooks on a line.

"I found out a few things about the gunner when I was on watch this morning," Goat announced. "Took a chance and had a little chin-fest through the air with Billy Glaves over in Felgo."

"Some of these days, Goat, you're going to have your last chin-fest. Some one is going to log you for unofficial conversation. Then suddenly you'll be getting orders to make the next boat in, bringing your bag and hammock. What about the gunner?'

"Regulations were not made for wise men like me," Goat returned with a grin. "Why —Billy says he's a brand-new gunner. Just been made. Snared an S O S that saved a ship-load of people down south of Guam a month or so ago. And got boosted from first-class up to gunner. Fine scout, Billy says."

"Just about what I had him doped out for," growled Graveyard. "Some kid whose head is all swelled up and ready to pop. He'll go strutting around with that dignified, I'm-an-officer-and-a-gentleman attitude. He'll come feeling around the powerhouse machinery with white gloves on, calling my attention to 'this dirty commutator,' 'that loose connection,' 'these warm bearings'—overloaded with his new responsibility, you know. To me, who was in the outfit when his mother was still wiping his nose."

"I never could see these made-over-night officers myself," said Goat as he tossed the sinker of his line into the water. "I'll take the officer out of Annapolis every— Sizzlin' cats!" he broke off. "Look at our drift!"

The lines tautened out and stretched away horizontally the instant they dropped them.

Looking up, they noted that the rock was a good mile away.

"Better drop the anchor," said Graveyard.

But the heavy piece of pig-iron that usually served the purpose of an anchor was not in the boat.

"Funny!" puzzled Goat. "That anchor's always in the boat."

"Well, it's not here now," Graveyard replied. "And we're scudding away from the rock fast. Let me get there at the oars."

"In this case Beauty precedes," Goat grinned. "You might be able to lick four or five wildcats at a time; but when it comes to pullin' an oar I got you 'way in the shade."

As an oarsman Goat had an enviable record. He was an ex-race-boat man.

"You go ahead and hook the gunner's fish," he said as he began pulling leisurely. "I'll just hold 'er even with the pull of the current so we don't drift any farther away."

Several minutes later Graveyard spat forth an oath. Goat looked over his shoulder, and then did likewise.

The rock had been swallowed in fog! And in the few moments they sat there staring, the mass of misty density swept down upon them and reduced their range of vision to a few yards. It came with a suddenness that robbed them of their breath.

"How in blazes are we gonna head?" cried Goat in alarm. "We don't know how the island bears!"

Graveyard was less susceptible to panic.

"Only chance," he answered, "is to head dead into the current, or as nearly so as we can, until the lighthouse gang starts up the fog-horn."

Goat spat on his hands; then gripped the oars in earnest.

"Watch me put this baby over the water. I'll show you my old race-boat stroke."

As he said that Goat lay back with all he had as if he expected to lift boat, men and all, clear out of the water with that stroke. Two things happened: There was a sharp crack; Goat went sprawling backward over the thwart. Trailing from the right oarlock was an oar without a blade.

"Hang it, Goat!"

And that was all that was said between them for a long time. Completely enveloped in fog—with only one oar—a mile and a half from the rock, and drifting fast—such was their predicament. There was no power-boat on the rock! With bulging, apprehensive eyes they stared, and continued to stare at each other.

At length the distant honk of the island fog-whistle came to them. They knew by its faintness that it was at least two miles away. They knew by the rapid rate at which it grew fainter and fainter that they were drifting fast, and would soon be out of hearing range of it.

"Think we could swim it, chief?"

"What? Two miles? Against the drag of this current? We might, in about a month, Goat."

* * *

GRAVEYARD became aware that Goat was holding out the end of the broken oar to him.

"See it? Sawed half-way through and filled in with putty!"

"I know how to break an oar," Goat went on doggedly, laying down the broken oar and picking up the good one; "and I know how not to break one."

He ran his eye along the good oar.

"This one too! Look!"

"Sure is a neat job," commented Graveyard after a close examination.

Then for several minutes he sat back regarding Goat with a quizzical expression.

"Goat," he said finally, "we're in a —— of a fix. No anchor—oars doctored—a gallon jug of water. The worst of it is, after what Beans told me yesterday, I should have known it."

He paused; then added abruptly—

"How much tobacco have you got?"

"Pretty near a whole sack," Goat answered.

"Then we're not so bad off. But we'll have to go easy on the water. A gallon won't last long."

"Can't hear the fog-horn any more," said Goat huskily.

Away through the fog they drifted. So thick was it that they could feel it against their faces—wet, sticky and chilling.

They spoke scarcely a word. All that broke the death-like silence was an occasional lapping of water against the boat's side. A bird with a broken wing could scarcely be in a more helpless plight.

After what seemed several hours Graveyard looked at his watch.

"About noon?" inquired Goat.

"Ten o'clock," informed Graveyard.

"No kiddin'?"

"There! Look at it!" snapped Graveyard, holding out the watch.

"Well—there ain't any use in chewin' a guy's head off, is there?" retorted Goat.

"There might be before we get to the end of this cruise, Goat. There's nothing else in the boat to chew on but each other."

"And that lets you out, chief, 'cause you're too ugly to give even me an appetite."

It was Graveyard's open and undisputed boast that he was the ugliest man on the west coast.

"You're safe yourself, Goat, for some time to come," he returned. "I wouldn't go in very deep betting on you at a beauty show."

Before Goat could twist his face into a grin something happened that drew forth his favorite exclamation.

"Sizzlin' cats!" he cried as the boat suddenly lurched over until she was dipping water.

Hanging on to the port gunwale was a giant sea-lion. The animal made no sound—just seemed satisfied to hang on and blink into their faces. But while he hung on the port gunwale was submerged.

Only Graveyard's presence of mind saved the boat from filling and swamping in less than a minute. He stooped, picked up the end of the broken oar, straightened up and brought it down with all he had on the animal's head.

The sea-lion uttered a deep grunt of pain and let go of the gunwale. Then, growling and snarling, he commenced swimming around the boat, keeping just beyond reach of the half-oar Graveyard brandished.

"Come on, Goat!" cried Graveyard. "These fellows always travel in company! Get that good oar in your mit!"

No sooner had he said it than another pointed nose stuck out of the fog. This one tried to come aboard over the bow. Goat jabbed him full in the face with the blade of the unbroken oar. As the animal let go he gave the boat a shove which, combined with the force of Goat's thrust, sent it ahead with a run, stern foremost.

With an abruptness that sent them both sprawling over the thwarts the boat bumped into something with a thud. With the thud came a growl of pain.

A sea-lion emits a noise akin to that of an old pig, but deeper, more sustained, and many times as loud. Immediately a chorus of growls went up and began to close in about them. And before they could realize what they had bumped into the water around them became a tumbling mass of swirling foam and flying spray.

They had drifted into a pack of sea-lions. These animals, though they spend most of their time ashore, sometimes ranging inland extensively, often sally forth to great distances from land. Although a stray one or two will occasionally be met with at sea they are gregarious and usually travel in large numbers.

From out of the fog on all sides of them came the huddled mass of rounded heads and pointed noses and glistening bodies. Snarling and growling, they closed in around the little skiff until the noise about the two men became a howling, ear-splitting roar.

Again the boat lay over until it was dipping water, as a huge bulk hung on to the side; but immediately two fin-like paws laid hold of the other side and balanced her back to even keel. Soon other paws laid hold of the gunwales until it seemed that the boat must inevitably be pulled under.

"Come on, Goat!" yelled Graveyard. "Howling ——'s turned loose. Clout 'em off. Soak 'em on the fingers—like this—and on the snoots!"

And while he shouted Graveyard laid about him, smashing the fin-like paws as they lay hold of the gunwales, and snoots as they came within range of his club. But for every animal he beat off there were three jostling and fighting for the place left vacant.

They fought like two madmen: Graveyard swinging about him, smashing paws and snouts; Goat using the unbroken oar spear-fashion, jabbing it into open jaws, gouging eyes; until the bedlam of yelps and snarls and growls that went up about them must have been audible for miles.

Graveyard Wilton had that happy faculty of being able to think in a pinch. Despite the suddenness with which they had found themselves embroiled in that turmoil of noise and splash, he did not lose his head. While Goat jabbed out at random with his unwieldy full-length oar, Graveyard distributed his swings with method. He swung on whichever side was deeper in the water—the side bearing the greater weight. Thus, though the boat was tossed and rocked about giddily by the scrambling, splashing horde, by Graveyard's carefully placed swings a balance was maintained that kept the gunwales above water.

They finally succeeded in clearing the gunwales. The animals came to recognize the pain-dealing efficiency of the swiftly moving club and the sharp-bladed oar, and kept clear. Still they continued to jostle and jam about the boat, lashing the water into a seething, splashing whirl that kept spraying and surging over until it had risen above the ankles of the two fighting men.

Then in trying to make a long-distance swing at a snout a few feet distant, Graveyard accidentally threw his club away. A moment later Goat overreached himself in making a jab, and to keep from going over had to let go of his weapon.

Immediately the pack closed in. Graveyard snatched up the water-jug; but it was wet, and as he raised it aloft it slipped from his grasp and plunked into the water.

HAD it been the time ordained for Goat and Graveyard to cross the big divide that porpoise would have been somewhere else.

An "I. W. W." bomb dropped in a crowd of people would not cause a greater scattering in all directions than does the appearance of one big black porpoise in the midst of a pack of sea-lions. One porpoise can deal more death among a pack of these animals in five minutes than a whole pack of hungry wolves can deal among a flock of sheep in an hour. Sea-lions always give "porp" a wide berth.

As a porpoise always shows himself when swimming through the water the sea-lions can usually see him at a distance. But aided by the dense fog that morning, and the absorbing battle the animals were having with the two men in the boat, the porpoise approached unseen.

He came rooting out of the fog, and was in the midst of the mix-up before either the men or the animals were aware of his presence. The water boiled! Helter-skelter splashed the surprized horde in all directions.

Then a peculiar thing happened. One of the sea-lions got foul of the painter, or bowline, which had been dangling over the side, and became so entangled that in his frantic effort to make a get-away he took the boat along with him.

As they shot out of the snarling mass by a lucky freak of chance the oar Goat had lost bobbed up alongside. Goat gave an exultant shout as he reached out and recovered it. Then, swinging around, he commenced prodding the animal on the rump with the blade.

"Giddap, you son-of-a-sea-cook! Giddap!" he yelled as he continued to prod.

But that sea-lion needed no persuasion. He was making knots. And like any animal in a hurry—man, beast, fish or bird—he followed the path of least resistance. Southward, with the pull of the current to assist, they went skimming.

"Cut him loose! Let him go!" barked Graveyard as this realization flashed over him. "He'll have us down around Honolulu! Cut him loose!"

"Maybe we can make him go the other way and take us toward the rock," Goat temporized.

He was reluctant about casting loose from so efficient a moving-power.

"Take us toward ——," snorted Graveyard. "Cut him loose, I tell you!"

Goat knew Graveyard too well to waste time in further argument. He dropped the oar, fished out his knife and cut the line. Relieved of his tow, the sea-lion shot ahead into the fog. The boat gradually slowed down to the speed of the current.

"That's as close to —— as I ever want to get," declared Graveyard.

"I'd say that *was* ——" Goat replied. "Did I see you heave the jug of water?"

"Heave nothing! It slipped out of my hand."

Goat looked wistfully down upon the water about them. "Anyway it's gone," he said finally.

The growls and snarls had died off into the density. All about them was as before—fog and silence.

"And I'm sure thirsty," Goat added.

The suggestion made Graveyard, too, conscious of a burning thirst. Wet to the skin with water; ankle deep in water; a vast ocean of water stretching away on all sides; yet not so much as a drop of water to drink.

"Serves us good and right," said Goat after a while. "If we hadn't thought we was so smart, and wanted to get fish for the gunner, we might have ——"

"Oh, shut your bazoo!" snapped Graveyard. "Anyway talking makes you thirsty."

JUST how long Goat and Graveyard might have lasted would be hard to say. Without food one might live for a long time; but not without water. In so dense a fog there was little chance of their being picked up by some passing ship; and that fog lasted four days.

They were picked up, however, on that same day. It was Blackie, the gunner, who found them.

Early that morning Blackie crossed Felgo Bay and went hurtling over the bar and out to sea in the *Dolly Dean*. The *Dolly Dean* was a trim little motor-launch with a powerful engine and a world of speed.

She was Blackie's own—bought and paid for with one thousand dollars. The thousand dollars had been a gift of appreciation by the owners of the lost *Minnie Mine*—the ship whose S O S Blackie had, by a combination of patience, ingenuity and good luck, snatched out of the roaring tropical static in a remote part of the world months before.

Although Blackie's receiving that S O S message had not saved the *Minnie Mine* from sinking, it had resulted in the rescue of over two hundred people. Receiving that ship's position had brought about his advancement from the rate of electrician first class (radio) to the rank of gunner (radio). Thus had Blackie become an officer. To top this off it had brought him the check for one thousand dollars, with which he had purchased the *Dolly Dean*.

The instant he awoke that morning the whim struck him to make the trip out to Fog Rock in the *Dolly Dean*—it had been his intention to go out aboard the lighthouse supply tug, trailing the *Dolly Dean* astern. Blackie never tarried long over an idea that pleased him. Within the half-hour he was down on the water-front, bringing forth rubber coat and sou'wester from the *Dolly Dean's* locker.

A few minutes later he was alongside the lighthouse tug, lying at the dock.

"Tell your skipper not to wait for Gunner Blackhurst," he called up to the quartermaster. "I'll be out on the rock before you start."

"Pretty big trip for a little boat like that, Mr. ——"

The quartermaster's voice died off astern of him.

Like a torpedo the *Dolly Dean* streaked across Felgo Bay and out toward the harbor entrance. The skipper of an inbound tramp looked down over the bridge rail and wondered what wild, whimsical lunatic that might be, heading out into the vast Pacific so early in the morning in a peanut-shell like that.

Once headed out into the open sea, Blackie regulated and adjusted gas-feed and spark until he had the *Dolly Dean* bounding over the long swell like a thing possessed. From hollow to crest and crest to hollow she mounted and dived, taking each long, gradual rise and fall with an ease and grace that made the gunner's black eyes dart and sparkle.

He was glad, proud, elated in the ownership of this wild, throbbing thing of beauty and speed and efficiency. She was a doer and a goer. And had the *Dolly Dean* been possessed of the faculty of knowing, she in turn would have been proud of her big, handsome, black-eyed owner who, rubber-coated and sou'westered, sat there at her tiny steering-wheel, holding her on dead west. For all the way down to the roots of him Blackie was a he—a doer and a goer, and as straight a shooter as ever wore the blue uniform.

Forty miles west, over the blurred horizon lay Fog Rock. As the entrance to Felgo Bay fell farther and farther astern he noted that the *Dolly Dean* carried more and more port helm. That is, the farther offshore he proceeded the more apparent became the sidewise push of the southerly-running current, and the more port helm necessary to hold her on west. Before long, even with the helm nearly hard over, she was continually falling off to the south.

A gasp of surprize escaped him as he looked astern. The two lofty peaks that marked the entrance to Felgo Bay, instead of bearing dead east, or directly astern of him, lay to the northeast, off his starboard quarter. He was being steadily carried sidewise and to the south of his destination.

He brought her around to west-northwest. Then, looking astern repeatedly, he watched and closely checked up the bearing of the two receding peaks. Ten, twelve, fifteen miles; then the two peaks merged into the long gray shore-line, and the tiny break was no longer distinguishable. A little later the shore-line merged into the horizon. He was nearly half way out; out of sight of the mainland, and about to come within sight of the rock.

Then down out of the north came that sweeping mass of fog. With a suddenness that made his senses reel the vast stretch of water was shut off from his sight. Beyond the *Dolly Dean's* vibrating bow he could see nothing but a shrouding wall of mist.

For a moment he thought of putting about and returning. He had strong doubt of his ability to make the rock in that density. But this doubt was quickly dispelled by the reassuring thought of Fog Rock's whistle. He knew it could be heard at two miles. This, he estimated, gave him a four-mile-wide stretch to head for; and if he brought up anywhere within that four-mile stretch he must hear the whistle.

Two hours later, for the fifth time within a half-hour, Blackie stopped his engine and lay to, listening. Not a sound, other than the smooth purring of the *Dolly Dean's* engine and the swish of the water parting under her sharp-pointed prow, had he heard since leaving Felgo Bay.

West northwest, or two points to the north of the course proper, he had headed nearly all the way out. Had he, he wondered, in thus trying to compensate for the southward push of the current, overshot to the north; or had he, despite the northerly course he had steered, nevertheless been forced to the south of his destination? Was he north or south of the rock? Had he come far enough west? Fifteen knots was the *Dolly Dean's* speed. Three hours he had been under way. Allowing for the retarding effect of the current and for the stops he had made to listen, he estimated he could be very little more than or less than forty miles off the coast.

The joker was, he was outside of the two-mile hearing radius of Fog Rock's whistle. Not far outside of it—that he knew. But in what direction?

For ten minutes he sat there listening and speculating. It was nothing more than a guess, he decided. The only chance of locating the rock was to go circling around till he found it.

Just as he was about to execute the decision, however, he heard a faint, low, hornlike honk. It was so faint, however, and of so short a duration that he was unable to establish its bearing. Watching the compass card intently, he strained to hear.

In thirty seconds it came again, this time much louder. It was to the south of him. He had overshot, and was north of the island, he concluded; and while he had been stopped and lay to, listening, the current had carried him south to within range of the island fog-whistle.

Then it was that he was brought to a full realization of how powerful was the southward pull of the current. For a while he lay to, listening, the frequently repeating whistle grew louder so rapidly that in seemingly but a few minutes it was honking from out of the fog right over his head. And then, when it seemed but a hundred yards distant, the whistle began to die off to the east of him.

He started his engine and went ahead slow, bending over the steering-wheel and peering searchingly into the fog, with his left hand gripping the top spoke, ready to throw her hard over either way.

Suddenly he heard a rushing of water. The next instant it splashed in his face. As he swerved to the left, a slowly churning propeller passed by on his right. Up alongside of him loomed the dark hull of a ship.

FOR the second time that morning the skipper of an inbound tramp looked down from his bridge and wondered what wild, whimsical lunatic Blackie might be.

"The rock? What, Fog Rock?" he replied through a megaphone to Blackie, who ran along under the port wing of the bridge. "You're about five miles south of it, my lad. What are you doin'; lookin' for them two Navy men?"

"Five miles south! What two Navy men?" Blackie stammered, between surprize and curiosity.

"Why, two o' them wireless lads on Fog Rock went fishin' a couple of hours ago an' got their mothers' monkeys lost in the fog—so Fog Rock is yellin' by wireless. Last they seen 'em was about eight bells, just before the fog settled, about a mile off this side o' the rock.

"I'm lookin' for 'em—steamin' back and forth, and gradually workin' north. They say they ain't got a power-boat on the island. Guess we'll pick 'em up a little north o' here. Want to come aboard?"

Blackie deliberated.

"I don't know, captain."

Then after a moment's pause he added, laughing—

"I started out from Felgo for the rock, and got my mother's monkey lost too."

"Better come aboard. Your boat'll tow alongside all right—I'm only makin' four or five knots in this fog. I think we'll pick up them two fellers all right. Then I'll drop the whole shebang o' ye off at the rock."

The skipper then directed his voice

toward the fo'csle and ordered a line and a sea-ladder lowered.

A row of grimy faces, grinning over the rail, met Blackie's upturned gaze. A blur of motley noises came to him in the intervals between toots of the fog-whistle; mumblings of broken English in sarcastic tones; the muffled clanking and pounding from the engine room; the hiss of escaping steam. . . .

A line dangled within reach of him.

"Make it fast to your bow," said a gruff voice above him.

"You say I'm about five miles south of the rock, skipper?" Blackie shouted up, ignoring the line. "Dead south?"

"Well," drawled the skipper, "you might be a half a hair to the east or west o' south——"

"And those two driftaways," Blackie persisted—"they were seen about a mile this side of the rock at eight bells, eh?"

"Yep."

"Thanks. I think I'll see if I can't chase 'em up."

And the *Dolly Dean* went sputtering away into the fog.

Blackie had a strong hunch that those two men had drifted farther than five miles in two hours. He didn't think the skipper would find them by working to the northward. They were miles to the south by this time. But, having been on the high seas for eight years, Blackie knew better than to try to convince an old weather-beaten skipper of a tramp that he was laboring under an error of judgment.

Did they break an oar? was the very first thought that had flashed to Blackie. If so they were more than five miles south of the rock. With two good oars they could have, by pulling steadily into the current, at least kept from drifting very far; in which case the skipper was right in working to the north. But if they had broken an oar— It was not at all improbable.

"Anyway two heads are better than one," he reasoned as he once more lay to, listening to the ship's fog whistle die away. "Let him work north, and I'll work south."

And away he went. East two miles, then west two miles, working always to the southward, Blackie maneuvered. Blackie was a very thorough seaman. And with a thoroughness that left not even the possibility of a doubt in his wake he swept that two-mile-wide tract. Running at half-speed he steered back and forth, heading east for fifteen minutes, then turning widely to the south and doubling to the west for fifteen minutes. Three times during each run he shut off the engine and allowed her to glide along on momentum, the while he shouted his loudest and listened for reply.

Two o'clock found him still zigzagging east and west, shouting and listening as he went. He grew hungry. Plenty of water but not so much as a cracker had he brought. In his ardent enthusiasm that morning over the idea of speeding out to the rock in the *Dolly Dean*, he had overlooked breakfast. And the constant straining to penetrate the fog, the stretching to hear, the frequent shouting, had begun to tell on him. He was beginning to weaken. A cracked huskiness crept into his shouts.

Nearing three o'clock, when his lungs were so sore that his voice was commencing to fail him, coming on the end of a westerly run, Blackie picked up the blade of an oar. The find brought an exultant cry from him, which, however, was followed by an ejaculation of surprize as he noted that the oar had been severed partially by sawing.

This set him thinking. And the longer he regarded the broken end of that blade the more intense became the conviction that rottenness had been at work.

Stimulated now, however, by the happy belief that he was right in working south, and by the revived hope of soon hearing an answering shout come from out of the fog, Blackie became more tense and alert than ever. He threw all he had into the game. He forgot that he was hungry, that it pained him to shout, that it was late in the afternoon.

Shifting his sweep farther to the west, he cut down on the east and west runs, and shortened up on the end turns. He literally combed the water.

But when another hour brought no reward to his efforts his optimistic hopes again began to wane. Again the pangs of hunger crept in. He became aware that his shouts were nothing more than grunts. And then pain—pain in his lungs with every intake of breath.

Hunger, pain, unrewarded effort, however, would never have deterred Blackie, nor have caused him to admit even a thought of giving up. The stuff that gives up had not been used in compounding his indomitable nature. He would have gone on combing that tract of sea throughout the fast-approaching night, unheedful of pain, hunger and fatigue.

But, unlike men, engines have no will to drive them on after the energy-generating supply has been shut off. His supply of gasoline was running low. He doubted even now that he had enough to make the rock. Moreover, pounding north into the current would be a heavy drag on the engine, which meant an abnormal consumption of gas.

Should he continue the search, or head north for the rock? With a replenished gasoline tank, a satisfied stomach, a megaphone and one or two companions it would be play. But alone, hungry, weak, voiceless, withal under constant anxiety over a depleted tank, the ordeal was nerve-tearing.

And then he found them—or rather he stumbled upon them. Swinging round to the east, slowly gliding along on momentum, debating whether or not to take one more turn east and west, Blackie heard angry, snarling voices off to the left of him. His engine being stopped, pointing off to the left brought him head-on to the current, and quickly checked his headway.

The voices grew louder rapidly. They were more akin to the voices of animals than of men.

And, glaring and snarling at each other like two vicious animals, Blackie found Goat and Graveyard. Drenched to the skin and chilled to the bone they sat there, one in the bow and the other in the stern, shivering and chattering like two half-drowned apes.

Wild-eyed and open-mouthed, doubting their vision and mistrusting their mental faculties, the two stood up and stared in mute amazement at the rubber-coated man emerging from the fog.

"Hello, Graveyard," came a husky whisper, as the *Dolly Dean* eased noiselessly alongside of the skiff. "Been yelling so long it's all I can do to whisper."

And a whisper was all the noise Blackie could make.

For a moment Graveyard continued to stare in blank bewilderment. Then recognition leaped into his eyes.

"Rummy!"

And as Blackie leaned over with outreached hand his rubber coat flapped back and Graveyard saw a bursting shell on the collar of the coat beneath. The gunner! Blackhurst!

The name came back to him readily now. Rummy Blackhurst of six years before. The bookworm who had lived in the dog-house. And who liked fish.

"——'s fire!" he drawled, leaning over toward the man in the *Dolly Dean*.

GRAVEYARD'S astonishment, however, reanimated him but momentarily. Beholding their rescuer emerge from the fog; observing in him a subordinate of years before; at the same instant noting him to be the officer whom he had been deriding and railing at for twenty-four hours; all this, coming upon him in a moment when he was about to give up hope, while it had the effect of awakening a momentary flare-up of wild delight had also the effect of overwhelming still further his already overwhelmed senses. And after that momentary flare-up Graveyard lapsed into a dazed listlessness.

Goat merely wilted back in the stern sheets, mutely blinking up into the black eyes of the gunner. He heard the other telling him to get aboard. He saw Graveyard clamber ponderously over the gunwale. He knew in a vague way that he wanted to get up and do likewise, but was unable. At length the gunner's broad shoulders bent over toward him; Goat felt himself being lifted over into the cockpit of the *Dolly Dean*.

Very few further words were exchanged while making the skiff fast astern and getting under way. Blackie's overworked lungs gave him pain even to whisper; and the two he had picked up were so completely dumfounded with the suddenness of their unhoped-for rescue that speech was beyond them—they were spell-bound. After quenching their thirst they huddled together in the cockpit under Blackie's rubber coat, and immediately fell asleep.

With the current to buck, and a tow astern, the *Dolly Dean* chugged north slowly. Darkness came on. Blackie switched the light onto the compass. A stray beam played on Graveyard's face, causing him to turn over and mumble irritatedly in his sleep.

"I will like —— give up my bungalow! To some —— young rat? We'll start him off on fish."

Then Goat chimed in.

"Atta boy, chief. On the fingers—an' on the snoots. You threw the water-jug away! You're a liar!"

"Officer and a gentleman," scoffed Graveyard. "Familiarity breeds contempt. And me in the outfit when his mother was wiping his nose! —— young rat!"

"Gunner likes fish," cackled Goat. "Positive."

"Doll —— up!"

Blackie chuckled. Then as the gist of what they were saying worked in on him he broke into a laugh. And Blackie continued to laugh while the *Dolly Dean* chugged off mile after mile, and Goat and Graveyard continued to ramble and rave in their sleep.

BLACKIE awoke with a start. He had dozed at the wheel. A glance at the compass showed him that he had slept but a few seconds, for he was steady on his course. But something had waked him. He thought he had heard a shout. Imagination, he decided. So had he, in those passed three hours, imagined time and again that he heard Fog Rock's whistle.

Then it came again—from astern. It was a wild, piercing shriek. No imagination about that, he thought as he stopped the engine and threw the helm hard over.

The *Dolly Dean* careened heavily as she answered the full helm; and Goat and Graveyard were rolled over in a heap.

"Oh, Graveyard," Blackie hissed huskily, "snap out of it for a minute till we see what's what. Some one off here a ways. Let out a yell—I can't."

Before Graveyard could gather his scattered wits and comply, however rapidly approaching voices were heard.

"Giffs it no answer, ain't it?"

"Never mind, Dutch; you lean on them oars."

A touch of the wheel brought the *Dolly Dean's* nose around, pointing in the direction of the voices.

"Make der light out of der eyes!"

"Shut up, or I'll make bullets in der eyes!"

The sound of that voice brought Goat and Graveyard to life.

"Beans!" they cried together.

A light burst out of the blackness. Blackie tried; but the *Dolly Dean* refused to swerve on such short notice. There was a crash, followed by a chorus of startled voices, oaths, the grating of tangled oars, surging water. For a moment the rammed dingey rocked and bobbed perilously; then she righted and floated along side by side with the *Dolly Dean*.

In the stern sheets of the dingey were Beans and Simple. Simple had the tiller in his hand; Beans held a bull's-eye lantern in one hand and an old-fashioned, long-barreled forty-five in the other. On the pulling-thwarts were Meullor and Dutch.

As the rays of his lantern fell on Goat and Graveyard, Beans let out a yell that made them all hold their ears.

"'SMOKY,' 'Nut' an' 'Speedy' wouldn't listen to me," Beans went on. "Said it was some of the effects of my jag. Said you an' Goat was anchored off in the fog not far away, an' couldn't make it back against the current. Wouldn't believe I heard them two skunks scheming against you.

"But I knew what I heard, an' I knew what I dreamed. An' I knew further that there never was a current off here so strong that Goat Perkins couldn't make headway against it.

"I wanted bullets fer this gun. You had 'em locked up in your closet. They said I only wanted to bust open the closet to get at the alcohol.

"But Simp here took me serious. Him an' me hashes it over. First we piles a lot o' grub into the dingey. Then, bein's they wouldn't let us bust the closet open fer the bullets, we just took the empty gun an' went out after Meullor an' Dutch.

"The two of 'em was on duty, runnin' the fog-horn engine all afternoon, so we had to wait till they got relieved. But this evening we goes out an' rounds 'em up nice an' quiet-like, an' made 'em pile into the boat an' man the oars. Told 'em they was gonna pull till we found you. See, Simp an' me was figurin' on doin' the watch-an'-watch stunt—one sleep while the other held the gun—the empty gun."

"Beans," said Graveyard with intense enthusiasm, "you're a hoss! You had them doped right, old boy; they sawed the oars."

"An' took the anchor out of the boat," Goat interposed.

Blackie now spoke up.

"Who owns these two boats?" he asked.

"The skiff is ours; the dingey is a lighthouse boat," Graveyard answered.

"All right, you fellows," said Blackie to the two in the dingey. "Pile that grub into the skiff; then pile yourselves in."

He then turned to Beans.

"What were you steering by, lad?"

"Had this little pocket compass," Beans replied.

"Give it to them," said Blackie shortly. "And now, you two birds, I'm going to give it to you straight. I'm going to trail the dingey astern of me, and you, in the skiff, astern of the dingey. From what little I know of this mess I think we'll be able to send the pair of you over the road. At any rate I promise you we'll try—if you're still astern of us when we get to the rock. I'm too low on gas to chase you up, in case you decide to cut loose. If you do cut loose remember, dead east'll bring you up somewhere on the coast between here and Mexico."

The boats strung out astern, as the *Dolly Dean* swung around and once more bucked into it.

Graveyard fidgeted beside Blackie at the wheel. He didn't know whether to call him Mr. Blackhurst, Rummy—he never had known Rummy's first name.

"Gunner, old-timer—" he finally began.

"So you thought the —— young rat was coming out to take your bungalow, eh? Had me doped out for one of those I'm-an-officer-and-a-gentleman birds, eh?"

For a moment Graveyard was stumped for a reply.

"——'s fire, Rum—er, gunner," he finally blurted out, "I didn't know it was you! Forgot your name. As for the bungalow—that goes to you automatically. Even if it didn't I'd be glad to turn it over to you. For after what you've done today everything I've got is yours."

"I don't want your dump," said Blackie. "You see, old shipmate, it's like this. Since getting a nibble of this officer stuff I've come to want a whole mouthful. I figure there's nothing to stop me from making ensign and going right on up if I once get back to the books again—I've been too busy lapping up Asiatic red-eye these past six years to soak up higher mathematics and theory.

"And so when I heard the rock personnel was to be increased, and that a gunner was to have charge, I thought of my old den, the dog-house. Just the nice quiet little place I wanted for a year or so. But nothing doing on the bungalow. What do you think of our little speed-boat? Ain't she a lulu?"

There was a sudden, very slight yet perceptible quickening of engine throbs, and the *Dolly Dean* lurched forward a trifle faster.

The men in the cockpit looked astern into the blackness.

"I think they've cut loose, Mr. Blackhurst," said Simple.

"Can we account for that skiff?" said Blackie to Graveyard.

"Sure. I can fix that O. K. on my quarterly report."

"Satisfied to let them go? Save us a lot of inconvenience."

"Glad to get rid of them."

A little later they came within hearing of Fog Rock's whistle. Nearing midnight they found the landing.

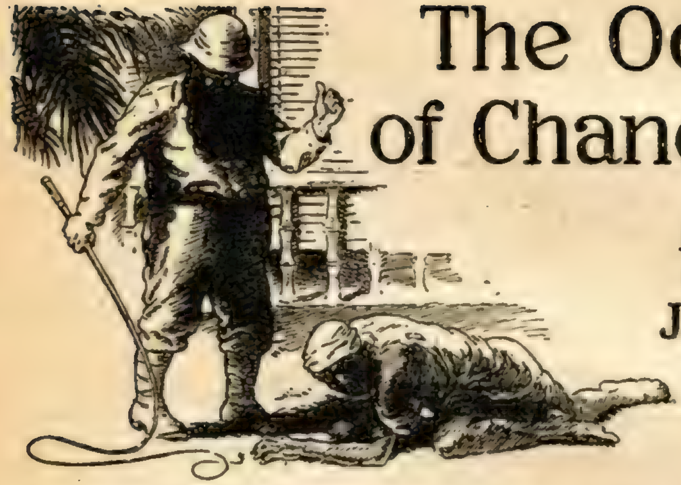
"Sure feels like coming home to put my hoofs on this old rock," said Blackie, as they started up the path that led over the hill and down to the radio station on the other side. "That dog-house'll look good in the morning. That place is the nearest I've ever had to a real home."

He then directed his voice over his shoulder saying:

"How about it, cook? Do you feed fish once in a while?"

"Fish any time you want 'em, sir," responded Beans.

"Atta boy," enthused Blackie. "Tell all the gang that any time they want to run in to Felgo, instead of hailing a fish-boat, just jump into the *Dolly Dean*. She belongs to the gang."



The Odyssey of Chandar Roy

by

J. D. NEWSOM

IF CHANDAR ROY, the babu, had not used his official position as a civil servant in the employ of the British crown to smuggle rifles and ammunition across the border to the people of the Ally Musjid territory, this account would never have been set down.

The temptation, however, was too strong, and Chandar Roy allowed certain confidential intelligence concerning the movements of a bullock train to reach the ears of a Nat mendicant.

The latter, pausing only to spit on the shadow of a passing native policeman, promptly wound his filthy rags about his person and made his way across the border, where eager gentlemen with hooked noses and wild eyes quickly acted upon his information.

Thereafter many things happened. The bullock train, winding up the narrow valley toward Kohat, was cut down, and the next day hurrying patrols found the remains of the escort lying dead between the smashed carts, an insult to the rising sun. The highly valuable treasure of Lee-Enfields and ammunition was gone.

Then a Bhat story-teller came down by night from the hills and talked over the compound wall to an artillery major, who was reputed a fool by all the bazaar. What they said, as luck would have it, was overheard by the second sweeper who had dozed off behind the bushes by the wall.

The sweeper had three wives and many children to support, so he carried his news to Chandar Roy—and the latter, paying quickly from the hoard of rupees in the girdle around his waist, flew by the first train for the all-engulfing safety of his Calcutta kin.

His departure caused little disturbance, but the Machine was set in motion and a price was on his head.

Steaming Calcutta ceased to be safe, even though he was a very commonplace babu, not too thin nor too fat, not too big nor too little, with shiny black skin, and round, placid face.

By devious ways he reached Pondicherry, which is French, and he breathed more freely, until one evening near the Place Dupleix, as he passed a narrow doorway, a wicked knife ripped his alpaca coat and the shirt beneath, from the armpit to the waist. He went back to his lodgings keeping to the open road.

But India was too small for him. From the Kyber to Cape Cormorin, industrious folk would be watching, and up North at Khushalgarh, six well-oiled rifles and a blank wall waited patiently for the home-coming of Chandar Roy.

So, when the French Governor issued a proclamation that another colony, namely New Caledonia, was in need of labor and would pay all expenses to the island, Chandar Roy bided his time, and by dint of avoiding crowds and keeping to the broad highways, finally reached the Recruiting Office. There were few volunteers, for to cross the great black waters means loss of caste. The handful of Pulayams and Kurumbas present only emphasized Chandar Roy's possibilities. He talked in his best copy-book English to the whiskered and bearded official, who finally made him sign a contract which he failed to understand because it was printed in low caste Tamil and French.

A week later the transport sailed for the Pacific. The officials had worked diligently, and the boat was crowded, but, though there were Buddhists and Brahmans, Christians and devil-worshipers, drawn from every menial caste of Southern India, Chandar Roy was the only babu on board.

He lived in splendid isolation, and, when he recovered from the sickness which afflicted him for a week, his heart sang within him, for he had cheated the blank wall of its victim, his girdle was still heavy with gold coins, and ahead lay another land—a land full of promise for an educated babu, who could read and write and talk such perfect English.

He would try to secure a position in an office. He would take a wife—and the House of Chandar Roy would prosper under another flag.

ONE golden day in May, a month after leaving Pondicherry, Chandar Roy set foot on the island of New Caledonia. The little town of Nouméa glinted and shone in the sunlight, and the heat poured in great waves off the corrugated iron roofs of the squalid houses by the docks, as the immigrants were marched through the streets to their camp. Immediately behind the cluster of houses which composed the town, hills rose abruptly, the front ranks yellow and parched, purple and mellow where they appeared in the distance.

The procession was watched by a score of natives clad in blue loin cloths and red open-mesh singlets, and an occasional European in white or khaki. The place slept.

Gone was the roar of Calcutta or Bombay, with the cluttered wharves and thundering drays. Everything was hushed, and the hills beyond added their weight to the impressive quiet.

Chandar Roy was industrious and intelligent. With the passing of time he had acquired a smattering of debased French from a woman accustomed to other pursuits than the teaching of languages, and when he appeared before the Immigration Official he was able to catch an occasional word.

"Chandar Roy," began the sweating official, pawing through a mass of documents, "you have signed a contract to serve as a laborer here in New Caledonia for a period of three years. You are to report to Mr. Duclos at Kopamoto Station."

The purport of the conversation, however, was quite beyond Chandar Roy.

"I much regret to state that I do not comprehend," he answered in English, with as much dignity as his soiled appearance would allow.

The harassed officer, who still had to assign some three hundred coolies before the end of the day, merely pushed five documents toward the speaker and thrust a pen in his hand. A grubby forefinger indicated the customary dotted line, and with a docility born of long obedience Chandar Roy signed.

The perfect calligraphy, with its rounded letters and flourishing capitals, failed to attract the attention of the presiding official, even though he was more accustomed to sprawling, straggling crosses than to perfectly legible signatures.

With two Goanese lascars, tired of the exacting service demanded of its firemen by the P. & O. Company, Chandar Roy journeyed to Kopamoto, at the northern end of the island, the last port of call of the little coastwise steamer which sails once a month from Nouméa.

The accommodation was suited to the simple requirements of his companions and the happy natives who shared the same quarters, but the stench and the filth appalled the gentle soul of the babu. The transport had been bad enough, but this floating horror nauseated him. To eat with black natives no better than the wild Gonds and Kols of the Chota hills! To sleep next to half-tamed savages! How he endured the three days' journey none can tell.

He spent most of his time on the narrow hatchway, where he tried to forget the stench of the galley in the all-absorbing reading of a much worn copy of Epictetus. Though he read the English translation, his great comfort lay in the fact that the writer had been a Greek. But even such phrases as—"it is not hunger that you fear—you fear you will have to cook" failed to deaden the smell and did not dissipate the sight of the sheep's carcass gently swaying from a hook above the deck, where it awaited the cook's pleasure.

The steamer eventually anchored off

Kopamoto at five in the morning. With the two Goanese, Chandar Roy went ashore in a lurching, staggering boat, which the singing crew pulled through the surf with little regard for the value of their passengers' lives.

On the beach he made the acquaintance of Mr. Duclos. His new employer was not particularly forbidding. In fact, at first sight, he looked agreeable and complacent. His rotund person was draped in loose khaki clothing, very worn, very soiled. Bright eyes peered out beneath the brim of the battered sun helmet, and the rest of his face was lost behind a black bushy beard. But the beard disguised a lean, hard mouth, like a sabre-cut across his face, and his chin sloped back at an extraordinary angle.

With his beard, Mr. Duclos appeared to be a master of men, firm and commanding, with a tinge of *bonhommie*. Without it he would have stood forth in his true colors, callous, brutal, and a coward in an emergency.

Chandar Roy soon discovered that he spoke English, acquired years ago when he left France for the Chicago stock-yards, before the Pacific had called to him.

When they reached the beach, Mr. Duclos looked them over indifferently.

"*Qui parle français?*" he demanded, and, meeting with no success, for the babu was momentarily speechless from the effects of the sea and the surf, he added—

"Speak English, Johnny?"

The Goanese only grunted, but Chandar Roy began—

"Master, my knowledge——"

"Right," snapped Duclos; "that will do. I'm not interested in your knowledge. Paul—" here, he indicated his half-caste overseer, part French, part kanaka—"will take the three of you to the coolie quarters and show you your work. He speaks no English—just follow him and he'll point out what he wants done."

"Paul," he added, in French, "feed them and get them out on the line quickly. Those fences by the water-hole at Nao need mending badly."

Without further comment they went through the thick plantation of coco-nut trees, past the white man's comfortable bungalow, to the native huts at the back of the house near the stables. Chandar Roy's spirit revolted at the sight of the wattle and daub huts, bare but for the canvas-covered bunks, a bench or so and a table top on trestles.

A native cook brought them bread, salted meat and coffee, and the others ate with a hearty gusto that drove the babu out of doors.

THE mountains were higher here, more jagged and abrupt than they had been farther south, but there was a denser vegetation, and a promise of more life amid the valleys no doubt tucked far away in the tumbled hills.

Long did that day remain vividly impressed upon Chandar Roy's memory.

When they left the plantation and trudged off along the narrow track, they first went through open fields where cattle were grazing; then they forded a stream, sinking to their waists in ice-cold water, and their heavy loads of nails, wire and hammers held them down while the current sucked and dragged at their ankles.

Beyond the stream, they left the track, picking their way between lantana bushes which tore through the clothing and scratched the soft skin of the babu. They crossed the razor-back ridge where pines murmured in the breeze, dropped into a narrow valley—and at last reached the fence.

By means of many gestures the overseer made clear to the new hands exactly what was expected of them. The posts were loose—pound them in. The wire had been broken—mend it, and make the new strands fast with nails.

But Chandar Roy was no common laborer. His hands were soft, his body ached intolerably, and the boiling sun beat down, making the hills dance and shimmer in the heat. Until noon he toiled miserably while thoughts of his neat white office flitted through his mind. His files! Those neat and orderly files where lay the cards he had industriously kept up to date in his fine, clear handwriting! And now he was hammering staves, and each blow blistered his palms.

When they stopped for dinner he turned resolutely to the overseer and told him that he could not do such work. But Paul did not understand the broken sentences and ordered him back to work with the gang. Chandar Roy shook his head and spoke slowly in English:

"I refuse to do such work. I wish to see my employer," and he pointed in the general direction of the Duclos plantation.

Understanding dawned on the overseer. Here was a black man who would not obey orders. Wa! There was fun ahead. He used his two words of English with a tone of command.

"Work! ——!"

To take commands from such a degraded person as a half-caste was bad enough, but to be sworn at was beyond endurance. The babu brushed an imaginary speck from his ragged shirt sleeve as he had seen done by the District Commissioner of Sikkim, and stalked away toward the house with all the dignity at his command. An ax came whistling through the air, and Chandar Roy took to his heels, squealing.

Somehow he reached the bungalow, but he had no recollection of tearing his way through the bushes and wading across the stream. One minute he was running away from a devil who threw murderous weapons at him—the next he stood panting before Mr. Duclos' veranda.

"Well, Johnny," came the white man's voice, "what's the trouble?"

"Master," answered Chandar Roy, "there has been a gross mistake. I am not a manual laborer. The overseer refused to listen to me, and——"

Mr. Duclos came out and stood on the veranda glowering at his new coolie. The knuckles showed white beneath the tan where his hands gripped the wooden railing.

"What," he barked, "you won't work—you nigger! You've signed on here as a coolie for three years, and you'll do exactly what you're told."

Very deliberately he took down a long-lashed stock whip from its peg on the wall, and came out toward Chandar Roy.

"But listen, master; listen, listen, oh, listen!" begged the babu, the words tumbling from his lips in an agony of haste. "I know all office work. Trained in Methodist Mission School, sar! Honors, sar! Failed for B. A. degree, sar!"

The whip hissed and snarled and caught the upraised hand of the pleading Chandar Roy. He fell to the gound wailing and the lash sent him rolling over and over.

"Now," said Mr. Duclos, "you black fellow, you hear me. I don't care where you went to school. I don't care what you are nor who you are. You're here to work, and I'm going to see you do. Get back to that fence. Go, Johnny!"

And Chandar Roy, sometime a civil servant in the employ of the British Crown, went back to the fence by the water-hole at Nao, with a great fear in his heart.

But the fear dwindled as the days and the weeks went by, and a black hatred grew up in its stead. He was not aware of the change. Of course, he hated the British because they had hounded him out of India without pause or rest. The Machine never acknowledged failure.

He had heard it compared to the mills of God— It, too, ground slowly but it ground exceeding small; and such efficiency repelled and frightened the babu.

New Caledonia had been the Promised Land where he would come into his own, where he would acquire position, wealth, family and happiness. Instead, he was faced by the grim Duclos and his tormenting overseer. He had to associate with coolies and natives—and the natives were the most sociable.

The coolies were the offscouring of a dozen eastern ports from Java, Penang and Sarawak. But the natives were simple folk, worshiping mysterious gods, willing to share their last crumb with any passing stranger. Their manners were atrocious, but they were kind and helpful and, when Chandar Roy had picked up enough of their rudimentary language, they told him wonderful tales of their villages lost in the hills, where there was food aplenty and peace and quiet.

The babu began to think along fresh lines. The process was painful and slow. For thirty odd years he had pictured himself as a scribe, a writer, a chief clerk, but no other ambition had entered his head. Whereas now there were fresh possibilities for an astute babu with a great black hatred of all white men in his breast.

THE crisis came one evening when Paul detailed the babu to be ready the following morning, an hour before dawn, to go with a party to round up wild cattle in the near-by hills. Once before Chandar Roy had done such work and he dreaded a repetition, for it meant tearing one's way through underbrush, over boulders and up steep slopes, always with the knowledge that some beast, too closely pressed, might suddenly break from cover and tear down upon the tracker.

Mr. Duclos was present on such occasions, riding an Australian cattle-pony, and his mean voice followed the men everywhere, bullying, commanding, cursing.

Among the hills the next day Chandar Roy found himself thrown with a native called Mbawani, a cheerful six-foot savage, with an enormous head of fuzzy black hair, accentuated by the hibiscus flower he always wore over the right ear.

They paused behind a thick clump of bushes, momentarily out of sight of the blustering Duclos.

"Over there," said Mbawani, pointing towards the high hills, "lies my village," —and his eyes were thoughtful.

Said Chandar Roy, using the local dialect—

"Mbawani, how far is the home of your ancestors?"

"Beyond that peak and that peak, across the valley of Boporo where the ghosts wander at night; then up that mountain with the flat top, and there—see—on the slope the smoke of my village. We could be there in three or four days."

"Cut off that cow!" came Duclos' voice as he swerved into sight—and the conversation ceased abruptly.

But that night two shadows crept away from the fire. They stopped by the blanketed form of Duclos, laying at his feet the broken shell of a coco-nut containing the tail of a small rat (which gift brings bad luck to all men in New Caledonia), and then drifted away into the night.

Mbawani and Chandar Roy were struck off the pay-roll of the Duclos Plantation, and the babu's name went down the coast to the nearest *gendarmerie*, as a deserter to be apprehended and returned as soon as the authorities considered him sufficiently punished.

Four days later they reached the village of Pouho, and the feast and dance which followed amply rewarded Chandar Roy for his sufferings. He slept in the men's house, a vast round hut with a pointed conical roof and, though he slept on the bare mud floor, his dreams were sweet and pleasant.

Mbawani had sung his praises at the dance, extolling his wisdom, his cunning, and his valor. The wild people crouching about had nodded their assent, emphasizing each of the speaker's telling sentences with the long-drawn "Ha—aa" of approval.

Now, among the people of Pouho and their neighboring tribes, there is a tradition, handed down from the beginning of time, that a god in the guise of a man would come from the land beyond the sea and would lead his chosen people to the conquest of the whole island. No white man could qualify for such a post, for all ghosts are known by their pallor, and there is a gulf between a ghost and a god-like spirit.

While Chandar Roy ate and rested, growing fat and sleek again, the elders held meetings in the communal cooking house, meetings from which women and children were debarred while the highest ranking man in the Ngami society conversed with the spirits of the dead and ascertained their commands.

The babu stumbled upon the enlightening information by the merest hazard. A chief of the Vohlu tribe came to visit his daughter, married to a man of Pouho. He brought with him a bottle of trade-gin which he shared with his son-in-law's father.

When Chandar Roy chanced upon them, both were very drunk, and he listened politely while they told of the great things expected of him. In fact, their speech betokened the most complete submission, and just before sleep gained the upper hand, the chief, in hushed tones, begged to be told when Chandar Roy's divine origin would be revealed.

In the dust before the cooking house, the next day at noon, Chandar Roy went into a trance as he had seen done by the Yogis of India during the Parvati festival.

The trance was highly successful and the people of Pouho watched in awe as the words came flowing from the mouth of the prostrate form.

"O Ngoro, Chief of Pouho," he chanted, "I come from the land of gods. You have not prayed in vain to your ancestors, for I am the Kwat you have called for. Mbawani was wise and led me to you that I might find my own people. Great harvests lie ahead, and great victories when the clubs of Pouho shall rule the land, and every chief of every tribe shall be a man of Pouho!"

And when he arose from the dust he no longer was a traitor fleeing from justice, nor an indentured laborer escaping from his master, but a God-sent creature among the people he was to lead to victory.

EVENTS followed slowly, for Chandar Roy was wise with the wisdom of the East allied to the method of the West. At first he cemented his hold upon the people of Pouho. Not only did he go into fresh trances, making astounding revelations concerning the past, the present and the future, but he introduced many novel features into the ceremonies of the tribe, features which may sorely puzzle the future ethnologist visiting this remote region.

The communal cooking house became a throne room where Chandar Roy ruled, sitting in a specially constructed chair, while Mbawani stood at his right hand. Immediately before him sat the elders of the tribe. Behind them the young men and warriors, and the women and children filled the background. From time immemorial the tribe possessed two great divisions, each with its particular sacred animal which it could neither destroy nor eat under penalty of a violent and painful death.

This custom the babu overthrew, for he mixed together and ate the flesh of the red flying fox and that of the eel. He incurred no ill-effects and the tribe lost its original divisions. The marriage laws suffered considerably through the abolition, but the result only became apparent at a much later date.

The fame of Chandar Roy spread to the near-by tribes, and they came in awe, paying homage. Soon the young men were dancing the Eragi war-dance, dedicated to the souls of ancestors who have died in battle, and the elders waited for a word or a sign to send their warriors down to the narrow valleys by the sea where the isolated white men live on their plantations and cattle ranches.

But Chandar Roy was cunning, and he failed to raise his hand, while he pondered day and night over the next move in the game. Up here in the north the French colonists were few and scattered, but they had rifles, whereas the tribes' only weapons were spears and clubs.

Soon the rifles on the racks at Kopamoto and Wangi and Oulava and twenty other stations began to disappear, and at Pouho in the hills, where no *gendarme* had ever strayed, a squad was being exercised in a garbled version of the Indian Army Manual of Arms as interpreted by the great god, Chandar Roy.

With his rifles, and the spears behind them, thought the babu, the northern end of the island could be held; but he had seen Nouméa and its whitewashed barracks. His small force would not last long when it met trained soldiers in the open. However, there was a gleam of hope.

If all the tribes could be united—if he could sway every native—he might succeed in sweeping the island bare of white men by sheer weight of numbers.

So the old men were called in from all the surrounding villages, and a great *pilou* was held. Two hundred warriors stamped, swayed and clapped to the incessant, vibrant tones of the bamboo drums, while the women, squatting in a circle around the dancers, wailed and wailed of the souls of unborn babes, begging the spirits that their seed might flower to manhood bringing them honor and love.

Next, the rifle squad was exercised by the babu to the sound of commands given in an alien tongue:

"Move to the right in fours— Form 'hors'— Right!— By-eee yourrr left— Queeeeck—marrch!" And the well-drilled natives wheeled and advanced, halted and marked time, while the people cried their approval. Here was a dance after their own hearts, rythmical, cadenced, graceful. All honor to the great Kwat!

Then the elders, covered in the hideous-faced masks of the Ngami society, worshiped at the skull shrine of their ancestors and played the sacred two-holed flute which is only heard on very sacred occasions.

Finally Chandar Roy laid down the law. There must be no tribal warfare; there must be no slaying of neighbors.

"I shall leave you for a space of time," he concluded, "and I shall journey to the South. Every tribe shall know me and every warrior shall follow me—then we shall form an army and drive all the white men into the sea."

"O Kwat," interposed the Chief of Moneo, who had never traveled beyond the sky-line of his native hills, "why should we wait longer? We have rifles and our warriors are smooth-skinned and strong. With you to guide us——"

"Enough," answered Chandar Roy. "You are foolish, for across those peaks to the south lies Nouméa, where there are great piles of guns and many men to handle them—and all the men are white. When all the tribes move together—when there is no danger of brother slaying brother, then and only then shall we conquer."

* * *

HE LEFT the next day with an escort of twelve men, fully armed. His progress was slow, for the way was very bad, but his success went beyond his greatest hopes. People far south who had never heard of Kwat were impressed by the rifle party; and the interpreters, under the influence of liberal potations of trade-gin, swayed whole villages.

Even the more sophisticated centers, where priest and *gendarme* called regularly, volunteered their help. There was always some petty trifle to be magnified—such as the depredations of wandering cattle in the yam fields, or the loss of some good patch of land to a colonist.

The fire smoldered. Before long strange tales began to drift in to the *gendarmes* at their fort-like little houses along the coast. The story of the rifle theft reached them first, and Brigadier Michard, who was sent to the hills to investigate, came back empty-handed.

Half-way up the mountains, where the narrow track winds and twists above dizzy heights he was suddenly stopped, for the path was gone—crumbled away, leaving exposed the sheer, smooth rock surface below.

How he managed to turn his snorting, trembling horse on the ledge above the abyss he can not tell to this day, but he finally reached safety without meeting a native. Later a runner came and made low obeisance before Chandar Roy where he sat in state in the cooking-house and retailed the incident. The babu smiled brightly and ordered all tracks to be cut.

Then the planters complained that labor, already so scarce, was still more difficult to obtain. No more six-foot giants were coming down from the hills to work on the estates, and even the most faithful servants were slipping back to their villages.

The missionaries on their rounds heard vague tales of a black god, greater than all other spirits, who traveled with an army at his heels. They knew the story of Kwat and, fearing greatly for their half-tamed flocks, handed their information over to the officials.

Chandar Roy was elusive. Guided by his small band of men he journeyed along river beds, up on the crest of hills, and through sweating forests, always avoiding the known paths, obliged at the beginning to risk twenty deaths where the narrow tracks had been destroyed by willing hands. Undetected he reached the outskirts of Nouméa, which he watched from a near-by hill-top where it twinkled in the dark with a thousand points of yellow light. Then he turned northward, well satisfied with his campaign, ready to send out the word of command as soon as he reached Pouho again.

Eight days after leaving the heights above Nouméa, they halted in a little valley, thickly studded with niaouli trees, by a stream which whispered and chuckled as it ran over its bed of round, polished stones.

The trees with their silvery gray barks and gray-green leaves, the steep mountain slopes covered in dense vegetation, and the tempered afternoon sunlight, all added to the beauty of the spot—but there was a snake in this garden in the guise of a *gendarme*, and the snake lost no time in striking.

He saw the little party halt and camp. He saw the gleam of the rifles in the sunlight, and, creeping closer after tethering his horse, he saw twelve men go down on their knees and adore a fat, black man with a shaved, round head.

While the escort was still on its knees, he settled himself comfortably behind a boulder and called sharply for surrender. The ceremony lost all dignity, but Chandar Roy had not toiled in vain: his men made a dash for the stacked rifles.

The *gendarme* squinted one eye and fired, shifted slightly and fired again, and two men of Pouho leaped high, clawed at the air for support, their eyes wide with surprize, spun round and collapsed, twitching where they lay.

A dozen shots answered, but the bullets flew wide, and a third tribesman crumpled and fell into the pleasant little stream which reddened slightly as the life blood poured out and mingled with its waters.

That was the end of the battle of Makalo, as it was officially designated. The remainder of the escort flew to the hills, but Chandar Roy dashed off to the right while his men went to the left.

The *gendarme* finally left the shelter of the boulder, lit a cigaret, and busied himself collecting the rifles which lay scattered on the ground. These he industriously smashed and bent and twisted, keeping only the firing-pins as proof of his success. His happiness was marred, however, because he found his horse shot through the head by a stray bullet, so he lost no time in shouldering his pack and making off toward the path, for thirty miles separated him from the nearest station, and on foot, in the night, the black fellow might come creeping back——

CHANDAR ROY, no longer a god, but a much terrified babu, hunted in vain for his men, and the next morning, very tired and worn, he trudged along the track intent on reaching the safety of the high hills where he would be among his subjects.

After all, thought the babu, if he could get back to Pouho nothing was lost, and his carefully matured plans could still be put into execution. He *would* lead his people!

But he took the wrong road when he reached the summit of the first hills and suddenly found himself headed toward the sea, placid and calm in the distance. He turned back in dismay, trotting heavily in his haste.

Chandar Roy negotiated a sharp bend, went up an incline which made him nearly crawl on hands and knees, worked his way round another corner—and came face to face with a white man riding a stocky gray horse with the nonchalance one might expect to see in Central Park or the Bagtor Hunt Club, but not on a rocky ledge five hundred feet above a precipice.

Chandar Roy could not catalog this new type. Instead of the customary sun helmet, he wore a much battered felt hat cocked on the back of his head. His blue eyes sparkled and danced in a round face tanned brown by exposure. He was clad in a collarless shirt open at the throat, his arms were bare to the elbow, and instead of riding breeches and leggings he affected a soiled pair of nondescript trousers tucked into the tops of high-heeled shoes.

The horse stopped automatically and its rider looked down at the babu with a grin on his face. For a moment there was silence. Then he pointed at the path, and pointed at the babu, and speaking in perfect English said:

"You'll have to turn back unless you can fly. This is no place for heavy traffic. But you don't understand English—*Retournez à la vallée*," he finished in execrable French.

Now Chandar Roy had no desire to turn back to the valley, so he answered politely:

"It is important, sar, that I should continue my journey without delay. If I should place myself flatly against this surface, could you not——"

"So you speak English do you? Well, I'll say it once more," interrupted the white man. "Turn back at once!" and his blue eyes grew cold.

When they reached the bottom of the declivity the rider grew curious.

"Who are you anyway?" he demanded. "I've not seen you around here before."

The babu saw his great dreams fade and vanish. He tried to lie, but the words died on his lips, for the eyes of the stranger seemed to search his very soul. They were hard, merciless eyes now, compelling the truth.

"Sar," he blurted out, "I am Chandar Roy. For months I served Master Duclos. He made of me a common manual laborer—and I am a trained office clerk." He finished piteously.

Light dawned on the white man. He slapped his horse's neck as he laughed.

"So you are the great black god! Well, believe me, you hide it well. I've heard a good deal about you. If the *gendarmes* get you, you'll go to the Hebrides and die of fever. There's been more trouble since you went into the hills than I've ever known before."

He slid off his horse and stood chuckling, his hands on his hips, and Chandar Roy was surprized to see that he was a short little man barely reaching to his chin. If he could reach his throat——

"No you don't," snapped the other. "If you start a rough-house I'll teach you something about fighting you never heard of before. I've handled black fellows in Western Australia too long for you to get me. What are you—an American nigger?"

"Sar," answered the dejected babu, "I am from Calcutta. Educated at the Methodist Mission School, failed for B. A. degree. I have extensive experience of routine office work."

"Have you? Well, that's fine," answered the white man. "Perhaps you've heard of me. My name is McLaird. Now just trot along that path. You're coming home with me and we'll see what's to be done.

"At present I don't think I shall hand you over to the *gendarme*. He's no great friend of mine,—lets his goats run all over my fattening paddocks. Now—march!"

And the babu went off along the track without a word. He had heard of McLaird. Every native in New Caledonia knew of him. He had come to the island some three years before to take charge of a cattle station owned by an Australian concern. He never raised his voice, he never raised his hand—but his bullocks were never stolen, and the natives worked for him when other planters could get no help.

He ranged alone through the mountains on his stocky gray mare indifferent to danger, always pleasant, always at work even when the temperature reached 110 degrees in the shade and the whole country gasped for air.

At dusk they finally reached McLaird's homestead. The babu was fed, and while he devoured the food placed before him by the Javanese coolie, McLaird sat on the other side of the table.

As though there had been no interruption in their conversation, he resumed:

"No, that *gendarme* is no friend of mine. I'll tell you what I'll do, if you promise to be good and forget about this black god business. I need a clerk. The firm over at Melbourne is clamoring for my accounts for the last twelve months and I'm hanged if I can make head or tail of them.

"Here you are—you're badly wanted—but I can give you a little place of your own behind the house and let you work at the books to your heart's content."

Chandar Roy arose majestically.

"Mister McLaird," he said, "I shall serve you faithfully. I can not thank you for helping to overcome my childish, censorious conduct."

HE ACQUITTED himself of his task with loving care; he restored order out of chaos; he balanced books and worked out overhead charges; he opened new ledgers and evolved fresh and intricate methods of accountancy. McLaird looked on with growing satisfaction.

The trouble in the interior died away. Harassed officials and missionaries heard no more of the great Kwat. He vanished, and tribes settled down once again to the planting of yams and the celebrating of marriage feasts. A great peace came over the land.

Only one of the babu's escort reached Pouho, and the tale which he told made the assembled chiefs nod wisely—the time was not ripe. But Mbawani, Chandar Roy's one-time henchman went out to investigate for himself, and, by dint of much travel and many meetings, finally located the babu.

One of McLaird's stockmen whispered the news to Mbawani and hurriedly went his way.

Some nights later the sleeping babu was awakened by a stealthy hand which gently tapped him on the arm. He sat up in dismay to find Mbawani on his knees by the bed praying—praying to Kwat!

They talked in whispers until nearly dawn, and the visitor went back to his village well pleased, for Chandar Roy had promised that he would again lead the tribes against the white men. His plans had undergone a slight modification, that was all. He would kill McLaird and use the house as his headquarters.

In two weeks' time Mbawani was to return. The Australian would be dead, and together they would fan the long smoldering fire into flame.

A week went by and the babu nursed his hatred. Instead of a benefactor, McLaird had become a brutal oppressor, a tyrant, cheating justice for his own ends.

Then came the great night.

Chandar Roy watched the lights go out in the house. The Javanese coolies pattered away down the lines to play mysterious games of chance with their fellows from a neighboring station. Standing behind a tree, he saw McLaird go into his curtainless bedroom, take off his clothes, light a cigaret, and stand by the window reading a month-old Sydney paper. How foolish the little man looked with his sunbaked face and bald head sticking out of his white pajama jacket!

Then he blew out the lamp, and the house was in darkness.

Softly the babu made his way up the steps. All the doors were open to let in the cool night air. Gently he stole into the great living-room, and the boards creaked hideously as he groped his way along the wall. A rat scuttled by in the ceiling overhead and the babu shook with fear. A ghostly light came in through the open windows.

He reached McLaird's door and paused to make sure of his grip on the long carving-knife. He stole into the room and stood flattened out against the wall. There was the bed . . . and then:

"One move, Chandar Roy, and you're a dead nigger. You're more clumsy than a fat cow. Drop that knife and stand still," came McLaird's voice in unhurried tones. "Don't you yet know that this darned indigestion won't let me sleep?"

The knife clattered to the boards. The man sat up in bed and lit the lamp. By its light the babu saw a vicious-looking blue-black Colt lying on the sheet beside McLaird, and he stood quite still until suddenly the flood-gates broke open and he poured the whole long story of his eventful life into McLaird's surprized ears.

When he had finished the Australian whistled softly, looking thoughtfully at the babu.

"So," he said, "you are a traitor," and he lapsed into silence as he bent down to slip on his boots. "Come on," he added, "you are a dangerous person to have about the house. If that *gendarme* had not let his goats stray through my paddocks, I'd hand you over to him now.

"Somehow, though, I don't care for the idea. He'd be too pleased. I'll think it over. You're going to the cellar for to-night."

And that was the end of Chandar Roy's career in New Caledonia. Subsequent events were highly irregular and illegal, but everything worked smoothly.

A cattle boat carried the downcast and tremulous babu to Brisbane, and a sailing schooner, skippered by McLaird's cousin, reshipped him as far as Singapore without the incident reaching the notice of the Australian immigration officials.

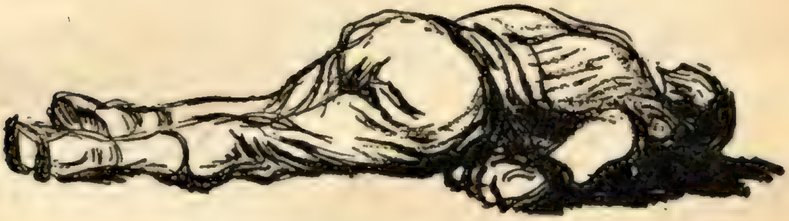
At Singapore, which smelled of home, the babu became hysterical, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he was handed over, sewn in a canvas bag, to a Dutch boat sailing for Calcutta.

Here he was set free, and the Machine, which is soulless and never forgets, deftly caught him without noise or fuss as he hurried toward the native quarter.

A little later, while several thousand miles away, the people of Pouho prayed to their ancestors that Kwat might be sent them again, Chandar Roy stood at dawn with his back against the blank wall at Khushalgarh. Six well-oiled rifles spat fire, six little whiffs of smoke curled up into the still morning air, and the Sikh band marched the firing party back to barracks to the martial strains of—

"Some talk of Alexander and some of Hercules. . . ."

And Chandar Roy lay dead on the ground



Wise Men and a Mule

by W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Tippecanoe and Cougars Two," "Powder Law," etc.

SHE'S the beautifulest story ever wrote. I tell yuh she's a dinger, and I'm a heap in favor of showin' it to the multitude, *ad lib*, also visibly."

"Magpie" Simpkins shifts his feet on the table and leans back in his chair, acting like he's said something real smart.

"The best ever told," admits "Old Testament" Tilton. "I longs to see it portrayed piously and with feelin' aforethought."

"But can she be done?" asks Wick Smith. "The time is short."

"Piperock can do anything she sets out to do," states Magpie.

"And everything else that could possibly happen between the time she starts and the time she finishes," says I.

"I figured it was about time for you to say something, Ike," opines Magpie.

Me and "Dirty Shirt" Jones wasn't invited to this conference, but we're there anyway. Buck Masterson, Wick Smith, Judge Steele, Old Testament and Magpie are the committee. Dirty said there'd likely be need of substitutes before the meeting had gone far, so we took it upon ourselves to attend.

"Three wise men won't be hard to find," opines Buck.

"Town's full of 'em," says Dirty. "Why stop at three?"

"You've spoke your piece, Dirty," states the judge.

"We've got to have a star, ain't we?" asks Buck.

"Yeah, we sure have," admits Wick.

"Beyond the shadder of a doubt in my mind," says the judge. "The star must be there, sheddin' it's effulgent rays across the desert, lightin' up the—uh—place, as it were. It's goin' to be hard to get a suitable camule or camules."

"Camule?" asks Buck. "Them humpbacked quadruples?"

"Camel," corrects Magpie. "Yeah, we've got to have one. We've got to have a lot of presents and——"

"Who's going to be Sandy Claws?" asks Dirty.

"Nobody!" snaps Magpie. "Them things are out of date. We're just steppin' along ahead of them ancient has-beens, yuh betcha. Nobody can go home from this celebration and say we had the same old stuff."

"Be —— lucky if they has the use of their vocal cords ten days afterwards," opines Dirty. "Piperock's Merry Christmas has always knocked —— out of Happy New Year's. I suppose you'll frame up a death trap and charge us a dollar apiece to get butchered for a Piperock Holiday."

"This is goin' to be free," states Magpie.

"Just like a suicide," sighs Dirty.

"Since when was you and Ike Harper invited to this meetin'?" asks Wick. "'Pears to me——"

"We're going out," says I, "but before we erases ourselves from your presence we'd like to orate open and free that we will not be part, parcel nor accessory to anything pertaining to or being of a Pipercock entertainment. We will not do this nor that, and neither will we do thus and so. We will toil not and neither will we spin to any extent. Our hearts are hard and our minds are made up like a mule's."

"Better wait until you're asked," advises Magpie.

"No trouble to sound a warning," says Dirty Shirt.

"You'd ask in vain, Magpie," says I. "I am full of wisdom——"

"Don't argue with that animated flagpole," says Dirty. "You never get no place talkin' back to him, Ike."

Dirty was right. I might as well argue with the shadder of death, because Magpie can't hear nothing but his own voice in a argument, and he knows he can hoodle me into places where an angel couldn't find footing nor room to flop it's wings.

I'm sleeping real hard when Magpie comes home that night, and he proceeds to sit down on me, yanks my off ear and yells—

"Ike!"

I shoves him off and sets up, covering him with my gun.

"Ike," says he, sober-like, "what is there around here that looks the most like a ca-mel?"

"It's a neck-and-neck race between you and Maud S."

"Thanks."

HE TAKES off his clothes and goes to bed, kinda chuckling to himself. Maud S wasn't no relation to the famous trotting mare of the same name, unless you figure back to the dim and distant past to the time when the devil got sore at a balky horse. He tried to haul it along by the ears, but the horse dug in his hoofs, the same of which stretched them ears a heap. When the devil saw what he'd done, he laughed. The horse, being kinda sore, ruined it's vocal cords mocking the devil's laugh. That's how we got our first mule.

Looking at Maud S from all angles I'd opine that she was the second mule.

Maudie was long. I don't think I ever seen so much mule all in one piece. Maud's neck was long and looked like it might fall off any old time and bust her crop-eared head. Her feet never wore shoes, and the ends of her hoofs turned up like the ends of ski snowshoes. Maud was cock-eyed in her one glass-eye, and her heart was bitter toward mankind.

Wick Smith owned her. He tried to sell her to a Piegan Indian, but the old buck got one look at her and said—

"*Diaub seahhost! Klahowya!*"

The same of which means—

"Eyes of the devil! Good-by!"

Of course Maud ain't no camel, but she ain't so danged far removed as yuh might think. The next morning Magpie gets a heap enthused over their meeting.

"We sure planned out some *hy-iu* festival. Goin' to be great, Ike. Sacred, solemn and satisfactory from all points of the compass."

"Undertakingly speaking?"

"Not this time. There ain't going to be no guns allowed. Every puncher will have to leave his gun at the door. See the idea? Bill Thatcher says he won't bring no orchestra, but we'll have one just as good. Ricky Henderson has mastered the flute, and Wick Smith's new drum is due here today."

"That's a —— of a orchestra."

"Yeah? 'Frenchy' Deschamps fell out with Bill Thatcher, and he's goin' to play his jews-harp in our orchestra. That makes three good pieces for our side, Ike."

"Tin whistle bass drum and a pheumonia noise."

"Mm-m-m-m, well, it won't be no Suzer's band, that's a fact, but it'll be music. Matilda Mudgett is going to sing something sacred, and Wick says that his wife wants to recite."

"Anything that Matilda could sing would seem sacred," says I.

"She could sing the 'Lone Star Trail' and make it sound like 'Rock of Ages!' Magpie, a face like her's would drive the evil from a burro's soul."

"Uh—I almost forgot, Ike. You're going to be a wise man."

"You're danged well right I am. I'm going to be so wise that I won't be within seven miles of here on Christmas Eve. I ain't going to be wise—I'm wise right now."

"You and Dirty Shirt and Half Mile Smith."

"No-o-o-o-o!"

"If you'd rather have some other two men—get 'em, Ike. I'm leavin' that part of it to you."

"No-o-o-o! I won't speak to nobody. I'm deaf and dumb. You and your entertainment can go plumb——"

"Well, now that it's all settled I feel better, Ike. You corral Dirty and Half Mile and bring 'em over to the Mint Hall tonight, and you'll find out what you've got to do."

"Magpie Simpkins, for gosh sake——"

"Ike, I'd tell yuh if I knowed, but I don't. Old Testament knows just what you've got to do, so be patient."

I finds Dirty Shirt in Buck's place, and he's inoculated against rattlesnakes. Dirty is bow-legged and cock-eyed, and wouldn't be no beauty if he wasn't. I tells him what has come to pass, and he listens close-like. Then he steps inside, yanks out his six-gun, and rings the little bell on top of the Mint Hall three times in a row. Then he puts his gun back and cocks his eye at me.

"I ain't drunk, that's a cinch. Mebbe my hearin' is weak, Ike. Say that all over again, will yuh?"

I explains once more. Dirty nods foolish-like.

"Sounded the same both times, Ike. What does a wise man have to do?"

"I don't know, Dirty. We'll find Half Mile and then they'll explain it to us."

"Half Mile's in jail. He shot three times at 'Scenery' Sims, and Scenery put him in jail for it. Here comes Scenery now."

THERE ain't no description to fit Scenery, except that he's about five feet tall and his voice squeaks and his mustache only grows at the corners of his big mouth, like the whiskers on a bobcat. He continues to be our sheriff, because nobody has took the time to kill him, except some poor shot, like Half Mile.

We explains the proposition to Scenery, and asks him will he let Half Mile be a wise man.

"How about me?" asks Scenery. "Half Mile ain't got no sense. I studied ellie-cushun oncet, and I've got a lot of natural sense about things like that."

"We don't give a ——," says Dirty Shirt, "only we wants to die in good company, Scenery."

"Bein' the sheriff I'll see that they don't get rough."

"Since when has a sheriff been able to intimidate these Yaller Rock snake hunters?" I asks. "The sight of you up there, Scenery, would be like wavin' a red rag at a bull."

"Nawsir," squeaks Scenery. "And besides they ain't goin' to be allowed to bring in no guns, so the judge tells me."

You can't argue with no tin whistle like that, so we takes him with us to our cabin, where we finds Magpie, Old Testament and the judge. We explains that Half Mile is in jail and that Scenery is desirous to be wise. Magpie says:

"That's all right, if he keeps his mouth shut, but we don't want no wise man with a squeaky voice. We'll let Ike speak all the words what is spoke."

"I can talk," says Dirty Shirt, "and I've studied ellie-cushun. I can make gestures, y'betcha."

"We ain't usin' none in this ta-blew, Dirty," states the judge.

"She's to be pulled off almost in the dark, bein' as she's a night pitcher, and gestures ain't goin' to do nothin' but mebbe ruin the thing. You hang onto your gestures and let nature take her course."

"Talk ain't much without yuh gestures," complains Dirty.

"Your talk wouldn't be much with 'em!" snaps Magpie. "Shut up."

"If you knowed anythin' about ellie-cushun, you'd——"

"If you're goin' to be a wise man, Scenery," says Magpie, soft-like, "you'll practise up right now by keepin' your —— mouth shut. *Sabe?* Go ahead and gesture if yuh want to, but keep still."

"Well, if I can't talk, I won't, but jist the same——"

"Stop!" howls Magpie. "Scenery, if you don't shut up you'll never live to run for office again."

"I ain't goin' to run again," says Scenery. "I wouldn't have the job again."

"Judge," says Magpie, "we'll let a certain few bring their guns inside the hall. Now, let's get down to business. Is Pete Gonyer makin' the star?"

"Moon. He had a round piece of glass, but he says there ain't no danged way he can cut a star. Moon will do as well, won't it?"

"If we can't get a star; but the Bible says they followed a star."

"Yaller Rock county won't never know that," says Dirty. "Not if yuh don't tell 'em."

"We're having the stage built twice as big, and then we'll put dirt over the boards so it will look like a desert. We'll have a curtain built along two sides and the back, and we've got to have them stairs braced up a little before we can bring Maud S up into the hall."

"Is Maud S comin' to the show?" asks Dirty.

"She's the ca-mel," explains Magpie. "Goin' to fix up some humps on her back and yuh never could tell her from a ca-mel. *Sabe?*"

"Suppose she brays?" says Scenery.

"Suppose she gestures?" says Dirty. "My ——, but a mule can gesture."

"Maud S ain't got a kick left in her old carcass," grins Magpie.

Just then Muley Bowles and Chuck Warner shows up, and joins us.

"Hear you're goin' to celebrate Christmas," says Chuck, wiggling his ears.

"Want the Cross J quartet to sing?"

"Nope," says Magpie. "This is goin' to be a sanitary proceedin', and there ain't goin' to be nothin' done that might incite violence. We're just as much obliged as though you burned your shirt, Chuck."

"We'd sure be willing to help your ceremony," says Muley. "We'd sing free gratis for nothin', without chargin' you a cent."

"Nope. I ain't got nothin' against you four punchers—not as individual human beings, but——"

"I gets your meanin', Magpie," says Chuck. "The Cross J ain't good enough for your danged old half-baked celebration, eh? Our harmonious voices don't fit into your blasted old program-me. We has suffered and bled that Piperock might make a success of their unusual doings, but from now on we don't do a danged thing to help yuh out. Your tone of voice is a insult to four of the best singers in Yaller Rock county."

"I'm glad you understand what I meant," says Magpie, mean-like. Muley and Chuck turns around and beats it for town.

"I reckon you know best, Magpie, but them four Cross J go-devils might do us wrong. Yuh might 'a' let 'em sing one song," opines Testament.

"Let's get back to the ca-mel," suggests Magpie.

"Let's get away from Maud S," says Dirty Shirt.

Then cometh Tellurium Woods, the danged old bald-headed bunch of wind. He's got a grin on his face.

"I GOT a idea," says he. "I'll be Sandy Claws."

"Where did yuh get it?" asks Magpie. "This is a Sandy Claw-less Christmas."

"Aw-w-w, yuh can't do that," wails Tellurium. "Whatcha tryin' to do—put the celebration on the bum? Here's the idea: I'll dress up like Sandy Claws, and when everybody is there and the program is about over we'll have Wick at the door. *Sabe?* Somebody will give him messages from Sandy Claws. Each message will show that he's that much closer. Everybody gets excited, don't yuh see, and at the right time I comes in. Fine, eh?"

"I seconds the motion," says the judge, "I remember when I was a kid——"

"I thirds it," states Testament. "She's a pious method, Tellurium. Beats having Sandy come down the chimbley."

"Well," says Magpie, weary-like, "go ahead and do what yuh like, but I want this tab-lew to be just like I sees it. Testament, will yuh look up something for the wise men to say, and how we want's 'em to dress?"

"Yea, verily I will, Magpie."

"I can make me some whiskers out of a horse's tail," says Tellurium.

"I hope the horse sees yuh takin' them," says Magpie.

Then the meeting broke up, and we adjourned to Buck's place.

Scenery is tickled stiff to think he's goin' to be a actor, but I ain't cheering—yet. Me and Dirty Shirt are veterans in this acting game, and we knows it takes nerve, speed and a strong constitution.

The old Romans and their wild animal arena never had nothing of Piperock. She's a place where milk comes in tin cans, and the only honey is what the sand-hornets puts up for their own use. Her motto is:

"Hurrah for ——! Who's afraid of a little fire?"

In Buck's place we finds Muley and Chuck, and pretty soon Telescope Tolliver and Henry Peck comes in, which makes the Cross J quartet complete.

"They won't let us sing, Telescope," says Muley, sad-like.

"They won't?" says Telescope, surprized. "Won't let us sing?"

"Not a note. Not only that but they insults us a heap."

"Well," says Henry Peck. "Well, the nerve of the pelicans."

"Don't blame us," says Dirty Shirt. "We ain't got a danged thing to do with it—not even the disposition of our own re-mains after the massacree is over."

"They won't let us sing," repeats Telescope. "Whatcha know about that?"

"Not even sing free," admits Chuck, wiggling his ears real fast. "It ain't reasonable. Why, they won't have no music a-tall. Bill Thatcher's orchestra ain't comin'. Bill said it cost him a new bull fiddle and a drum every time he played here, and he's savin' up to buy a slip-horn."

"You ought to be glad," says Dirty Shirt. "You sure ought to, boys."

"It's a insult to harmony," says Telescope. "We've almost got to the point where we can sing 'Tentin' Tonight,' with variations, and our 'Sweet Marie' sure does make the shivers run up your spine. 'Jay Bird' Whittaker says it's got anything beat he ever heard since he busted the ear tubes of his talkin' machine."

"What kind of a act does you perform, Dirty?" asks Hen Peck.

"I portrays Wisdom," says Dirty. "There's three of us, Hennery, three of a kind against a full house."

"Wisdom," proclaims Muley, "Wisdom consists of more than three things, Dirty. No three men can portray wisdom."

"We're goin' to give her a try, Muley. Me and Ike and Scenery."

"Wisdom—!" grunts Telescope. "You three?"

"And Maud S," adds Dirty, sad-like.

"Oh," says Chuck. "Oh, yeah. Well, mebbe you'll get away with it."

According to all we can find out, Christmas is the time of peace on earth and plenty of good-will to everybody. She's a time when the lion and the lamb lies down together, and the cowpuncher forgets that there is such a thing as a sheep-herder. It's a time when men's hearts are filled with love toward their fellermen, and a six-shooter is only a ornament; a time, when you can say, "Yoo-hoo" to a horse-thief, without expecting to grab a harp the next minute.

"Yea, verily," as Testament says. It is a time when grown men become like little children. Yeah, that's a fact—mentally. Piperock ain't got any too much sense when she's acting growed up; but right now—huh!"

* * *

THERE ain't no reason why a lot of disreputable snake-hunters can't spend their Christmas in Paradise or Curlew; but they don't. Nope. They clutters up Piperock to partake of our good cheer. Me and Dirty looks over that aggregation of incompetents, and the sight drives all wisdom, peace and good will from our hearts.

"Big Foot" Forrest, "Cactus" Collins, "Mex" Mason, "Pole Cat" Perkins, "Haw" Harris, et cettery, running the gamut of undesirable horse-thieves. "Hassayampa" Harris, who is a uncle of "Haw," brings his bunch of hard-boiled punchers over from Curlew, and Mike Pelly heads the aggregation of incompetents from Paradise.

The Seven A, Triangle, Five Dot, Circle C and the Cross J all cometh to hive up in Piperock and partake of the Christmas cheer, and everything else that might come to pass. They've got the Mint Hall decorated for the occasion, and so forth. They built the stage out until she's about twenty feet square, and about five feet high.

A couple of horse-thieves, who studied art in the penitentiary, painted the scenery. It's canvas hung at the back of the stage, and they painted it black and put on a lot of white stars. Sticking in the middle of the canvas is kind of a lantern rigging, with a round glass in it and a lamp inside.

"That's the moon," explains Magpie. "When this is pulled off that will be the only visible light. *Sabe?* Desert, yuh understand? We're goin' to put some rocks and a bunch of cactus on the stage."

"What do we do?" squeaks Scenery.

"You will be asleep," explains Testament. "The lamp will be turned low and have a cover over it. Everything will be still. I'll have somebody behind the curtain to take off the cover of the moon, and slowly turn up the lamp. One of you wise men wakes up and sees the dim light. You wakes up the rest of the bunch, and you all stands up, looking at the light.

"Then you—Magpie. I reckon we better have the mule layin' down, hadn't we? Well, you wakes up the mule, and then you all starts walking slow-like toward the back of the stage, and then we drops the curtain. That's all there is to it."

"We'll have to throw that mule," opines Wick. "Better hawgtie it, too, and let somebody cut the ropes when they're ready to go. The humps are all ready to be cinched on."

"What do we wear?" I asks.

"My wife is makin' the costumes out of gunny-sacks," says Wick.

"We've got to have something what looks like presents," opines Testament.

"I've got a picture, which shows a lot of vases and stuff like that."

"My wife's got some stuff that will be just the cheese," says Wick. "We'll use some of her chiny vases."

"What do we have to say?" asks Scenery.

"Ike will do the sayin'," says Magpie. "He'll be the one what wakes up first and he will say—uh—what was it, Testament?"

"Lo, there shineth a bright light. Let's go to it."

"My——!" gasps Dirty Shirt, pious-like. "But save the wimmin and children first."

"It's sure goin' to be a wonderful thing, and will teach a moral," says Testament.

"Yes," says I. "And the moral is: Let well enough alone."

"I'd ought to say them words," squeaks Scenery. "I think a thing like that needs appropriate gestures, and I've studied——"

"Might be better," says Wick. "Gestures helps a lot. Remember Willyum Jennin's Bryan, when he was preachin' fer silver. If Scenery would sort of loosen up his vocal cords a little——"

"Let him say 'em," says I. "I'd hate to pass out with them words on my lips. Scenery, you're elected."

"All right," squeaks Scenery. "I'll study up my ellie-cushun a little. Feller gets kinda rusty, you know it."

"Yeah," admits Magpie, "and kinda squeaks. You don't need study—you need some kerosene and then a application of axle-grease, Scenery."

The next morning we took Maud S up the steps into the hall, and I'm here to say that Maud S made life miserable for us. A mule is hard to argue with on the level, but try getting one half-way up a stairs and have it stop to think. We took Maud S in sitting down, bucked her onto the stage, where she lays down and refuses to get up.

"Fine!" says Wick. We "won't have to hawg-tie her."

"Stage fright," opines Magpie.

"Safety first," says I. "Animals have instincts, and her's is to get below the line of fire."

Me and Dirty meets the Cross J quartet, and they're getting cheerful.

"No," says Muley, "we ain't goin' to no celebrashun. They have done us dirt and we sickens to our soul at their per-fid-i-tee."

"Sheveral per-fid-i-tees," nods Telescope. "Group aroun' me while we shing a shong of gladness over the merry Chris'mas time. All together now:

"Oh, the coyote said, I'm better than a puncher,
With a gun that goes blam, blam!
He may die and go up to heaven,
But his skin ain't worth a ——".

"You sure does get into the Christmas spirit," opines Dirty.

"That's one of the sweetest things I ever heard."

THEN I calls Dirty outside, and I says to him, like this:

"Dirty, me and you have got to stay sober. A drunk ain't goin' to have no chance a-tall in there if anything goes wrong. If we hangs around with them celebratin' shorthorns we won't be in no shape to get up and foller that star. We'll be just like Maud S, which can't or won't get up."

"That's right, Ike. We'll get a couple of quarts for ourselves and keep away from them hard drinkers. Don't yuh reckon Maud S will get up at the right time?"

"She's plumb rooted, Dirty."

"Uh-huh. I know how to do it, Ike. Come on."

Dirty went over to Wick's store, and later on I meets him; and we goes up to my cabin.

We've got them two quarts of hooch, so we has quite a little time of our own, waiting until the afternoon gets to the sere and yaller leaf. I wakes up and finds Dirty with flour all over his clothes, but he won't tell what he's trying to do.

Magpie hunts us up and acts peevish toward us.

"Gosh a'mighty," he complains. "Ain't yuh got no sense? We're tryin' to re-hearse and you fellers hide out down here. Come on."

We just gets to the door, when we meets Muley Bowles.

"F'r th'lasht time—do we shing?" asks Muley.

"You do not!" declares Magpie. "I thought you knowed that, Muley."

"May you resht in peash," says Muley. "May your anchestors rise up and mock you for bein' a —— fool. Autographically schpeakin':

"May your hair wear out
And your nose break off
And your teeth shake loose
From whoopin' cough.

"Thish is the best wishes of your friend Muley Bowels, E-squire, December twenty-fourth."

"Tha's good," says Dirty. "That's fine. Roshes are blue, vi'lets are pink—uh—no, that ain't it. Vi'lets are red and roshes are blue— Haw! Haw! Haw! No knife can cut our love up. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Why don't you say something, Ike?" asks Magpie. "You're just as drunk as they are."

"Yeah, but I'm mean drunk, Magpie. There ain't nothin' flowery about me. I ain't in no mood to wish whoopin' cough nor violets on mine enemies. Let's go."

"Sufferin' sun-fish!" grunts Magpie. "Look at Rip Van Winkle."

"It's me—Tellurium," says the apparition. "Don't I look it?"

He sure did. He's got a old bear-skin overcoat on, and about three strings of sleigh-bells around his waist. He's got a stove-pipe hat on his head and on his chin is a bunch of whiskers made from the tail of a white horse. Personally, I think he's the dangest-looking thing I ever saw.

"Well," says Magpie, "you sure look it, Tellurium, but I'm danged if I know what you do look like."

"Sandy Claws," says Tellurium, proud-like. "I'm him. Come up to show you what can be done when you've got the ambition."

"Sandy Claws?" says Magpie. "No, no Tellurium. Sandy Claws don't look like that. What do yuh want to do—scare folks? You look like a cross between a item of natural hist'ry and a smallpox germ."

"I comes into the program as a sort of special thing," says Tellurium.

"No," says Magpie, "not into my program, Tellurium. You better go out and scare coyotes with that outfit. I ain't using no Sandy Clawses anyway."

"I've went to a lot of trouble," complains Tellurium.

"So've we," says Muley. "He won't let us shing, and now he don't want no Sandy Clawses."

"I'd make a good one, too," says Tellurium.

"Yeah, you would—not," says Magpie. "I'd just as soon see a wild bull come in there dressed like that Tellurium. You'd ruin the show, you know it."

"Let's not talk to him," says Muley. "He has no soul, Tellurium.

"He won't let us shing. Nossir. No Sandy Claws, no shongs—where's your ol' Christmas?"

"Come on, Ike," says Magpie. "Let 'em wail. I'm goin' to pull off one show that Piperock can be proud of, yuh bet your life."

WE WENT up to Mint Hall. Mrs. Smith and Matilda Mudgett are there, sort of strutting around like a pair of fool-hens. Ricky Henderson, Wick Smith and Frenchy Deschamps are there, fixing their orchestra seats. Wick's new drum is there, and he's some proud of it.

"Mr. Harper," says Matilda, "have you ever heard 'Spring, Lovely Spring'?"

"Not since last April," says I.

"We are going to render it tonight," says she.

"We?"

"Me and Mrs. Smith. She has a lovely alto."

I goes over and talks to Ricky.

"Ricky, you knows something about music—what is a alto?"

Ricky thinks deep for a while, and then he says:

"Ike, did yuh ever let out a whoop, and then hear the same whoop come back to yuh? That's it?"

"I thought that was a echo."

"Yeah, sure; but that's only when yuh hear one reply. *Sabe?* When yuh hears two replies—that's alto. It's a Hungarian word, which means two."

"What does it mean when you hears more than two?"

"That's basso profundo, Ike."

"I thinks Maud S is paralyzed," complains Wick. "She don't seem to have no use of her legs."

"For this we offer much thanks," says Dirty.

"But she's got to get up and go with yuh," says Wick.

"You can't leave her layin' there on the stage."

"She'll get up," declares Dirty. "I know a lot about mules. Lemme alone and don't worry about Maud S."

"There ain't much use of rehearsin'," squeaks Scenery; "I'm the main thing up there, and I've studied my gestures aplenty, and I know the words fine."

"We've got to put the humps on Maud S," says Wick. "We can hang some stuff over the humps, so nobody will know she ain't a ca-mel. You know how they does in a circus, Magpie?"

Me and Dirty, not wishful to get the least hazy, decides to buy us some more bottle cheer, instead of carousing around with the common herd, and we communes with each other in my cabin, until the shades of night have come down upon us. Then we finds our way back to the hall. We've got a full audience—in more ways than one. Doughgod Smith has been appointed door-keeper and he annexes our guns as we goes in.

"Yuh can't take your guns in with yuh," he states. "Them is orders."

He's got a lot of belts and holsters, but few guns hanging on a hook. Dirty looks 'em over and picks out a good-looking gun, which he shoves down inside his waistband.

"Them orders don't say yuh can't pack a strange gun, do they?"

"Not my orders," says Doughgod. "They tell me not to let any man in with his gun, that's all. You ain't settin' no precedent, Dirty. I reckon every man in the hall is packin' a strange gun, but there's one satisfaction—they can't shoot more than six time per each, 'cause I've got all their extra ammunition."

I picks out an old decrepid .44, and goes inside the hall. I looks over that congregation and I can't see where Doughgod had any reasons for being cheerful. There's at least a hundred men in there, which means six hundred shots, which is usually plenty and sufficient.

The reward notices are sure well represented, and you could just about lynch the whole bunch and not make any mistake.

We finds the acting talent behind the curtain. Scenery is all dressed up in a gunnysack gown, with a ribbon tied around his head and no boots on. He's making gestures like a prize-fighter.

"My ——!" gasps Dirty. "Would yuh look at that?" Scenery jerks one fist outward and upward, swings the other arm behind him, like he was guarding his rear, and then squeaks:

"Lo, there shineth a bright light. Let's go to it."

"Mark an X after Scenery Sims," says Dirty. "He won't last."

We goes over where Wick is looking at Maud S. She's still laying down and don't act like she's ever get up again.

"'Fraid she's on her last legs," says Wick. "Yessir, I reckon we're goin' to lose Maudie."

"'Fraid?" snorts Mrs. Smith. "That de-eared hay-hound? Let her die."

"Not until she's been a ca-mel, maw," says Wick, and then he goes out to set down beside his new drum.

Dirty sets down beside Maud S and takes her head in his lap.

"Ain't the Cross J quartet going to sing?" asks Matilda.

Old Testament shakes his head.

"Nope. They got mad—them and Tellurium. They all went home."

"Tweet, tweet, tweet," goes the flute.

"Bum! Bum! Bum!" goes the drum.

"Whar-r-r-oo-o-o-o-o-m-m-m-m," goes the jews-harp.

"The orchestra is tunin' up," observes Dirty. "We ain't got long to live, Ike."

THEN old Judge Steele steps out through the curtain, and the hum of conversation dies down.

"Feller citizens and ladies," says the judge, "the first thing on the program is a du-it. Miss Mudgett is going to sing 'Spring, Lovely Spring,' with the kind assistance of Mrs. Smith. This here is a soupranner and alter duit. We asks yuh to bear with the orchestra to the limit of your patience, as this is their first appearance together."

"Who?" asks Big Foot Forrest.

"All of 'em. They're acquainted, but that's about all you can say for 'em. All right, Wick—let her go."

"Tweet, tweet, tweet! Bum, bum, bum, bum! Whar-r-r-oo-o-o-m-m-m-m!"

Mrs. Smith and Matilda goes out through the curtain. Somebody laughs out loud and then comes a thud.

"All right—go ahead," says Hair Oil Heppner's voice. "Big Foot thought he saw somethin' funny, but he's forgot what it was."

The song starts and this is how she sounds:

"Tweet, bum, Spree-e-e-hing, lovely spree-e-e-hing, tweet, tweet, bum, whar-r-r-oo-o-m, Spree-e-e-hing, Spree-e-e-hing, bum, bum, kerong-g-g-g, tweet, tweet.

"You cree-e-e-heep o'er me-e-e-adhows be-e-e-e-right, whar-r-r-room-m-m, bum, bum, tweet, tweet, o'er me-e-e-adhows be-e-e-right, bum, bum, bum, tweet, tweedle, wharoom, whar-r-r-oom——"

"Whoa, Blaze!"

I whirls just in time to see Magpie get kicked behind the knees by Maud S, who is laying down. She must 'a' just sort of cramped herself and then let fly with both hoofs.

Magpie turns plumb over and goes out through the curtain and right into Mrs. Smith, who is straining over "be-e-e-right;" and when they hit the platform she's on top.

"From Spring to Fall!" yelps Mex Mason.

Mrs. Smith gets off poor Magpie, and lets out a wail:

"O-o-o-o-o-oh! Every time I try to do something, some hammer-head comes bustin' along and spoils it!"

"Did you hit her on purpose?" demands Wick, standing up.

"Your —— mule—" begins Magpie, foolish-like.

"You done it on purpose!" howls Mrs. Smith.

Wick believed her, I reckon, cause he throwed his drum stick right at poor Magpie. It was a good shot. It came right through the hole in the curtain and it hit Judge Steele on the bridge of his nose. The old boy sort of got dignified acting.

"Wonderful," says Dirty. "Wonderful cons'tution."

The judge just walks around the stage, making gestures and working his lips, but there ain't no words. Pretty soon he stops, seems to listen, and then he says, soft-like:

"Guilty? Why, gentlemen, that man is as innocent as a new-born baby."

"Knocked back seven years," says Dirty, awed-like. "That's what he said the time he was my lawyer, and that was seven years ago."

The crowd out in front are talking loud, and I know danged well that there's going to be trouble if we don't keep going. Mrs. Smith comes waddling in, follered by Matilda and Magpie.

Mrs. Smith is sore as a boil.

"I will not sing another note," she declares. "Every time I start to do anything in public——"

"Maud S is getting restless," states Scenery. "We better pull off our act."

"Can yuh get her up at the right time, Dirty?" asks Magpie.

"Get things set, and I'll do my dangest."

Then they cleared everybody away, while we got ready. Me and Dirty and Scenery are all dressed in them gunny-sack gowns, and have got our boots off.

They've got a big bunch of cactus and a lot of rocks, which they puts around to make it look like a desert. Pete Gonyer is behind the back curtain, ready to take the cover off the moon, and then turn up the lamp. Maud S is making funny noises in her throat, but Dirty is setting on her head.

"What's the matter with her?" I asks.

"Speed-crazy," grins Dirty.

"Get ready," says Magpie. "Now, for gosh sakes, make this look real."

They blew out all the lights except one in the back of the room, and then pulled the curtain.

"What does she represent—a load of dirt?" asks Pole-Cat Perkins.

"That's a —— of a thing to ride thirty miles to see," opines "Windy" Wilkins.

"Where is the moon?" squeaks Scenery, in a whisper. "Pete, where in —— are yuh?"

"Aw, ——!" groans Pete. "Magpie, did yuh turn out this lamp?"

"It was lit when I left there!" snaps Magpie. "You must 'a' blowed on it."

"I never blowed on nothin'!"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Art Miller. "This is one funny game. Like a minstrel show. Pete, ask him why he thinks yuh blowed on it."

[illegible] COMES a little bit of light, and I feels Scenery climb to his feet. There he stands in the gloom, pointing up and down and sidewise, and then he squeaks:

"Lo, there brineth a slight—uh—slineth a bite—I mean—a—a—lineth a—let's go to it—uh—to it."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" howls somebody. "Pete Gonyer's lightin' the moon!"

I turns and takes a look. There is Pete at the back of the stage. He's got the cover off the moon, and is trying to get the old lamp to light.

"Dang it!" he howls. "I've turned the wick plumb into the bottom!"

"Whoa, Maud!" howls Dirty. "Help me hold her, Ike!"

I turns, and there is Maud S standing on her hind legs, and, as I look, them humps, which wasn't well cinched, being as she was laying down at the time, swing down and just about fill up all the space between her front and hind legs.

"Ho-hold her!" wails Dirty; but Maud S thinks she's a circus animal.

Hold her? Man, that mule, after all these years, found out that she had authority to go to some place. She waltzes around a couple of times, busts a hole in the stage and falls over backwards into the orchestra.

Wick Smith falls over backwards, pulling his new drum over with him, thereby saving his part of the orchestra.

"Whoo-o-o-ee! Pow-w-w-w-der Ri-i-ver!" yowls a puncher, and a circle of chairs lands around Maud S, trying to block her, but Maud S ain't to be stopped.

She bucked plumb over the top of Wick Smith, and that drum rattled against her heels.

Zowie! She telescoped and lifted that drum with both hind feet. Dirty Shirt was just going to jump off the stage to attack her from the rear, and that drum caught him in midair. Dirty comes plumb back onto the stage and lands setting down in that bed of cactus. The drum hit me in the knees, and I went plumb over the top of it and dug my chin into the desert.

When I got my senses again I sees that about seven punchers have hold of Maud S, and are trying to hold her.

"Lights!" yelps Wick. "Light some lamps. My ——, my drum is busted!"

"—— your old drum!" howls Dirty Shirt, standing on the stage, trying to lift the seat of his pants loose from himself.

"O-o-o-o-oh, the tab-lew is ruined!" wails Mrs. Smith.

Everybody helped light the lamps, and then we stands and looks at each other. Maud S looks like her course was about run, but them punchers don't take any chances.

"Sandy Claws has come!" yells a voice at the door, and we all takes a look. I never seen anything like that apparation. It's a two-year old steer, wearing a bear-skin overcoat, with a string of sleigh-bells around it, and on the lower lip of the danged animal is Tellurium Wood's false whiskers, and over one horn is that tall hat. The steer is about half way into the hall when we see it coming, and its tail is twisted over its back. Around its mouth is twisted a rope, which is yanked off as it humps into the door.

"Ba-a-a-rr!" blats that steer, like it hurt all over, and right up that room it comes, romping regardless of life or limb.

I know it was Chuck's voice that yelled—"Sandy Claws has come."

"Ho-o-old fast!" yells a puncher, and just then the steer lams into poor Maud S, scattering the punchers. Hair Oil Heppner tries to bulldog that locoed animal, but he might as well 'a' tried to bulldog a box-car.

Then Maud S gets enervated again, and things begin to boil a-plenty.

"Ba-a-a-a-w!" bawls the steer.

"Ha-a-a-a-w!" sings Maud, and the both of them starts gamboling toward the stage.

"Git ba-a-a-ck!" yowls Pete Gonyer. "Daw-w-w-gone yuh, git back!"

Rip-i-i-p! The steer gets its horns into the curtain, rips about twenty feet of it loose, and starts to climb the stage.

Crash! The moon went down, and the danged old oil lamp inside exploded.

"Fire! Fire!" howls Judge Steele, and then he picks up that blazing moon and whales away at the steer with it.

Clank! The judge was left-handed, which might account for the poor throwing, but he got his feet tangled in some of that loose curtain and hit Scenery Sims right in the head with that heavy moon.

Bang! Somebody took a shot at the steer and knocked several bells, and one of them danged bells hit me in the nose. I hate to get hit in the nose with a bell. I hates to get hit in the nose with anything, but I sure does detest a bell. I can see folks going out of the door as fast as they can travel. I seen Hair Oil climbing onto poor Maud S, and then my time is all taken up with that danged steer.

All this stuff is taking place a lot faster than I can tell it. I bulldogged that steer. It was the first steer I ever tried to bulldog, and if all future steers will keep away from me it will be the last.

I HOOKED onto his horns just in time to feel my feet dangle off the edge of the stage, the same of which helped my act quite a lot. The steer upends from my weight, and me and that steer landed into a jumble of chairs, and over the top of us goes Maud S, celebrating her second childhood by making Hair Oil pull leather.

The few remaining folks in the hall sort of celebrates by taking some shots at the lights, the same of which makes our immediate future kinda gloomy.

"Lo, I see a bright light!" squeals Scenery's voice.

"Sus-sunfish, you crop-eared coyote!" yells Hair Oil, and then comes a crash of glass.

"My ——!" yells Magpie. "She throwed Hair Oil out of the window! Where are you, Ike?"

"Keep away!" I yells. "I'm paralyzed all the way down from my upper lip and I don't know whether me or the steer is on top."

"Paralyzed —— ——!" howls Dirty. "Wish I was. Who in —— got the idea of puttin' cactus on the stage?"

"Look out for that mule!" yelps Magpie, and I looks up at the dim figure of that locoed mule, almost over me. I yanks away from my steer and the steer yanks right with me. Under ordinary conditions I'd 'a' been able to get away, but I've got one leg through a string of them sleigh-bells, and when that steer starts for the door, Ike Harper E-squire went right along—on the back of his neck.

I hooked a lot of chairs on my way, kinda trying to impede the hoofs of progress, but that scared steer made funny little noises and keeps going. There's a lantern hung at the head of the stairs, and I reckon the steer was hunting for light.

Just before we hits the top of the stairs I hears a strain of quartet music:

"Tentin' to-o-o-o-night, tentin' to-o-o——"

Crash!

We hit the doorway with our assortment of furniture, and the next thing I know I'm amid more feller mortals and we're all traveling the downward path. I sees some red, white and blue lights, and I'm loose. I reckon the bell strap busted. I gets to my feet, dodging stars and other aerial impediments, when the stairs almost shakes out from under me, and I gets a glimpse of Maud S falling downstairs.

Folks, I jumped—but too late. Me and Maud S landed at the bottom together. I grabs the mule with both hands, and I feels her get up with me hanging to some part of her anatomy. It's about twenty feet from the bottom of the stairs to the door, and I rode some part of that crop-eared mule as far as the exit, where the top of the door slapped me in the face and I went into the land of Once Upon a Time.

I'm just about to live happy ever afterwards, when something seems to wake me up. I feels a dragging sensation, along with other painful things, and then I dimly hears Dirty Shirt say—

"You've gotta help me, Muley."

"I've gotta have a little help myself," wails Muley. "I tell yuh that danged steer knocked me down and then the mule fell over me."

"But poor old Ike is de-e-e-ad!" sobs Dirty.

"He'll keep," croaks Muley; "but I'll spoil if I don't have help."

"Yuh gotta help me drag him home, Muley. You was to blame for his de-mise."

"Naw, I wasn't, Dirty. Chuck got the idea of dressin' up that steer in Tellurium's clothes. Tellurium was sore, too. We twisted a wire around the steer's tail to make it bawl when the gag was pulled off.

"We just wanted to make it blat at Magpie. Nossir, yuh can't blame us for it, 'cause that mule would 'a' killed him anyway. I'd like to know what in —— woke up that gone-to-seed mule."

"There ain't nobody to hear," says Dirty, "so I'll tell yuh. I took a can of red pepper and a can of ginger and mixed 'em. Then I made a gob of dough in Ike's shack and put the hot stuff in the middle. *Sabe?* Maud S. swallered it. That's all."

"They'd kill us if they knew," groans Dirty.

"Death's stinger wouldn't hurt me," groans Muley.

I crawls to my feet, and they don't see me until I'm standing up beside 'em.

"You—you—uh—" stammers Dirty. "You won't tell, w-will yuh, Ike?"

"Ain't you dead—yet?" gasps Muley.

"Enough," says I, "enough to foller out the old saying—dead men tell no tales. I've got eyesight enough left to see the lights of Buck's place."

"L-let's go tut-to it," stammers Dirty.

Which shows that Piperock never started anything that they couldn't finish—after a fashion.

The White Dawn

A Four-Part Story

Part II

by

HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "Gentlemen of the North," "Red Belts," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

WE HAD been thoroughly licked the year before on Long Island, and the English had taken New York. St. Leger with regulars and Indians was getting ready to pour down the Mohawk, and General Burgoyne's army had already crossed the Canadian frontier intending to sweep across Lake Champlain and Lake George to Albany.

The rest was easy to guess.

General Howe, who held New York, would push up the Hudson to join Burgoyne. And, then—well then there would be an end to "American independence."

In the meantime there was I, Sergeant Cleve Morgan, with my handful of men sweating under a June sun that hung over the Jersey meadows, not knowing what it was all about except that we were responsible for holding the extreme point of the left flank of the rear guard.

While I was questioning Miss Betsy Osmond, maid to Miss Audrey Betworth—who lived with her aunt in New York but had come to the Jerseys on a flying visit—the sound of musketry broke out in our rear. A few minutes later a carriage appeared, driven furiously. We captured it and found it contained Madame Betworth herself and her daughter, trying to escape from our lines.

Captain Sant then came up and took the responsibility off my shoulders; but he was in turn followed by General Benedict Arnold, who commandeered horses and carriage, and placed me and my men as a guard over the ladies in their own home until they could be questioned further.

General Arnold, who knew me by sight, and seemed to know something of my reputation, then took me aside and told me a chance had presented itself that could not be overlooked. The Betworths had come into the country ostensibly to meet their cousin, Ambrose Kerry, a Tory, on his way north from Annapolis to seek a commission in Howe's army.

"It is a double opportunity," said General Arnold; "first, to discover the methods used in keeping Howe informed of our plans; second, to discover valuable information—especially whether Howe intends to sail for Philadelphia or ascend the Hudson."

I instantly caught his meaning.

"Is it an order?" I asked.

"No," he replied sternly.

"Then," said I, "I'll volunteer."

And so I became a spy, taking on the character of Ambrose Kerry, while that young man's relatives were detained within our lines. My first objects were to get in touch with Waldron, a ferryman, and Joseph Berce, a merchant, in New York City. Disguised as a gentleman, by a stratagem I got safely through the lines, and eventually reached Manhattan.

Though there was a noose around my neck I now began to feel more at ease. I had already formed the acquaintance of Captain Saleby, a flippant young officer of the king, who might be of value to me, and Paul Bowen, a sober-minded refugee.

I was disturbed to find that Waldron, the ferryman, had vanished. Immediately I sought out Berce, and found that he, too, had gone; but I learned from a suspicious old hag who kept following me that he was in one of the English prisons.

A bit worried, I then went to Madame Betworth's house, where I was received by the old black servant, Socrates, without any open suspicion, though his canny questions added considerably to my increasing anxiety. Later, from my window, I discovered a slim boyish figure stealing away through the bushes. Socrates soon betrayed himself. He tiptoed to a closed room down-stairs, and presently the door opened again, and out stepped Betsy Osmond in boy's clothing!

Even now I did not quite feel I was discovered; for I didn't believe Betsy could recognize me in wig and silk; but I determined to make a quick attempt to find Berce, and then clear out.

First I looked up Saleby, and, making friends among his acquaintances, finally got him to show me around the prisons. From them I also learned

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"The White Dawn," copyright, 1922, by Hugh Pendexter.

that Howe was expected to sail for Philadelphia; but my only chance of confirming this lay with Berce. The next day, therefore, I made my way to the prisons with Saleby, and succeeded in locating Berce; but I learned that Berce was being held as a bait to trap other spies attempting to communicate with him.

Taking a desperate chance, I gave him the secret signal which he recognized, and scrawled a question in the dust of the court-yard where the prisoners were exercising—

"Howe to Albany?"

He read the question—erased it with his boot—then, suddenly breaking from his guards, rushed for the gate, though he must have known the attempt would mean his death. As he passed me, I flung myself at him as if to intercept him. Shots rang out. He exclaimed, so none but I could hear—

"Philadelphia by fleet!"

Then, flinging a missile at my head to save me from suspicion, the patriot fell dying in the dust at my feet while I stood swaying above him, the only living patriot with a knowledge of the tremendous message that must be borne to Washington.

CHAPTER IV

THE STORM BREAKS

SALEBY Betler, Maugem and I returned, to the King's Arms and had something to eat. Berce's tragic ending depressed me intensely, although I did my best to hide my mood. Saleby's thoughts were on the Bloomingdale engagement and I delighted him with a recital of the preparations old Socrates had made. Maugem and Betler accepted my invitation to join the party. Finishing our repast, a slight one on my part, Saleby and I started to call at headquarters. The two lieutenants returned to the riding-school to finish some routine duties and promised to return and meet us at the tavern.

It was only a short walk to Number One Broadway, and there was much activity about the place when we arrived. Orderlies were coming and going in much haste. Staff officers hurried inside and emerged, wearing grave faces. Captain Saleby and I were passed by the sentinel and entered a large square room looking on the street. There we found nearly a score of men waiting to see General Howe, or his representatives.

The number included a few civilians, rich Tories coming to complain of being mulcted. Saleby knew some of them by sight and gleefully told me they would not be permitted to offend Sir William's ear with their stories. We found chairs near the door, for Saleby was confident he would not be kept waiting once he asked an audience. An aide bustled in with pad and pencil and in a very methodical manner began disposing of the civilians. First he talked briefly, yet very earnestly, to a portly man with a heavy worried face. I heard him say:

"Impossible to see you now. Submit your statement in writing. The commissary charges the beef was spoiled and worthless."

"But they issued it as rations," cried the complainant.

"Your written statement will be reached in its order." Then much the same with the next, and so on until several of the callers were disposed of. Those in uniform were handled with even more celerity, a word being sufficient to send an officer into the street, or up the stairs to the presence of the commander-in-chief.

Finally he reached us and responded civilly to Captain Saleby's greeting, but with no show of enthusiasm. On learning our errand—my presentation to Sir William—he promptly shook his head, and said:

"Impossible, Captain Saleby. We will be delighted to make Mr. Kerry's further acquaintance and take up the matter of a commission, but not today. I will note down the name and when we have more leisure we'll notify him."

He bustled into the hall and up the stairs and left the room to fill up again with another grist.

Saleby's face was very pink over our brusk reception.

"Impudent young beast!" he muttered in my ear. "He, with his 'our' this and 'our' that! You'd think he was carrying the whole responsibility of this campaign on his back! If Sir William knew I'd been treated in such disgusting fashion— By my life! There's Captain Cogswell. Maybe the aide was right and something big is brewing. Good afternoon, Captain Cogswell. Ah, he didn't hear me. He's from the lord admiral, Sir William's brother——

"See! he passes up-stairs without being announced. He's expected. Sir William is waiting for the word he brings from the admiral. Give you ten to one we're bound for Philadelphia within two days and that the lord admiral reports the fleet is ready to take us aboard!"

As a sporting proposition I believed the captain held the best end of the wager. The dead patriot's assurance had satisfied me it would be impossible to secure better confirmation of the great news unless I waited until the troops were actually embarking. I was in a fidget to be clear of the building and planning my escape.

The other part of my task, to discover the leak complained of by General Arnold, must be left unfinished. The Bloomingdale engagement would give me my chance to escape north over King's Bridge and gain Putnam's army in the Highlands. To Captain Saleby I urged:

"Let's go back to the tavern and have a punch. Nothing to keep us here."

He hesitated between his craving for the drink and his desire to remain until he had proven himself to be a figure of some importance. Three officers clattered down the stairs and leaped on their horses. Saleby snapped his fingers excitedly, and softly exclaimed:

"By St. George! It's so. We go in haste. That German on the roan is on General Knyphausen's staff. He's making post haste to the general's headquarters in Wall street. The Hessians are camped at Corlear's Hook. The whole army is to be moved. Here comes Colonel Wentsel. Good! He'll bring news."

We met him just inside the door, and Saleby warmly greeted—

"Something in the wind, colonel?"

Wentsel stared at him coldly and replied—

"There's always something in the wind, if it's only dust." And he would have passed us had not Saleby, made reckless by the day's potations perhaps, insisted—

"But the news, colonel?"

Wentsel fairly glared at him, and then curtly said:

"You had better ask Sir William for the news, Captain Saleby— Mr. Kerry, I shall not be able to partake of your hospitality tonight."

Before I could express my regrets he was mounting the stairs.

"Roast those low-caste Germans!" hissed Saleby, his face the color of a boiled beet. "Listen to him putting on side because he's Knyphausen's errand boy! Well, he told me the news even by refusing. We're off in a rush, my dear fellow."

"All the more reason why we should make the night a lively one. An early start and a late finish."

"With you to the tops of my boots! With that German lout away I may stand a chance of winning. I feel it's my lucky night. Blast my blood, Kerry, but you're a decent sort. Wish you were in our mess. I say, could you manage to act as my privy purse tonight as well as my cellarer? Ha! Ha! Devilish quaint how the wheel turns. A happy-go-lucky officer of his gracious Majesty temporarily down to his last scudii. It's weird."

"I shall be honored to accommodate you, Captain Saleby. But you must wait until we get to Bloomingdale and I can interview old Socrates the butler. Personally I have but a few gold pieces I happened to bring with me when I cut and ran from the enemy."

"It doesn't matter. Some of the fellows probably can fix me out."

"The butler has the house funds and they are at my disposal. We'll share them in Bloomingdale."

"Strike me dumb, but you're a chap of the right kidney! No cursed beating about the bush, but straight from the shoulder! I vow you must get into our set. I'll see Sir William tomorrow, his secretaries be ——!"

"Thanks, captain, but I want northern service. I'm an outdoor man. Philadelphia will scarcely suit so long as I can choose."

We were at the foot of the steps and about to turn up the street when the aide who interviewed those in the big room came to the door and called the captain by name and beckoned him to return.

"Just you alone, Captain Saleby," he added when my companion would have piloted me back into the house.

"He's heard a hot word," gloated Saleby. "Sir William learned I was below. Rat him, but he deserved it! Take it on himself to dismiss Captain Roger Oakes-Welton Saleby as if he were some brute of a muffin boy!" And with chin high the captain mounted the steps.

I did not have long to wait. Inside of very few minutes the captain reappeared, his visage fairly aflame, his weak eyes hot with rage.

"All the dashed insolence!" he panted. "Warned me not to talk too much! I told him to get a weapon and step outside, anywhere, Bowling Green—the street.

Told him I'd see the color of his blood—I'll have him out yet! Had the audacity to say I was reported as talking indiscreetly."

"It's either Wentsel or Cunningham. I" believe it's Cunningham," I said.

This afforded him a diversion for his rage. He became the victim of a conspiracy. The wound to his vanity was healed. He talked of having Wentsel out, colonel or no colonel. We were standing on the inside of the walk, I with my back to the street, and while he talked his silly stuff my ear caught a *tap-tap* behind me. Saleby suddenly ceased his raving and stared curiously by me. I started to turn my head but desisted when he exclaimed—

"Old Mother Baff; and she seems to have the run of this end of the town!"

The tapping of her staff continued and I ventured to twist my head. She was not only making free with the military neighborhood but she was even braving the entrance to headquarters. She had not noticed us, although passing very close. Her straggling white hair concealed her profile with the exception of her nose and chin, and as she hitched up the steps she began whining:

"It's only old Mother Baff, dear. I must see the soldier men. Old Mother Baff has something to sell. They know me, dear—" this to the sentinel—"they bought my wares before." And to my relief she was permitted to pass inside. Had she been rebuffed I fear she would have noticed me and have recognized me as the man coming to Paul Bowen's assistance.

"Burn my bones! And that old hag will get Sir William's ear and one of his Majesty's officers is wigged for talking too much!" exclaimed Saleby.

"She has some news for them," I suggested, beginning to edge up the stret.

"Blood money. Ever since she piped on old Berce they're keen to listen to her. There's one blessed consolation—some day Canvas Town will finish her for the gold they believe she has hidden away."

WE QUICKENED our pace and soon reached the tavern and found the suppressed excitement of headquarters had spread and was being given free expression. Officers were talking in groups and ignoring the civilians as a rule, although here and there a prominent Tory was a member of a circle. We were hailed the moment we entered the ordinary, and Saleby waved his hand toward the relish-room, where there would be less confusion. We secured a table and were joined by Maugem, Betler and several other friends of the captain.

Despite the rebuke administered at headquarters Saleby began—

"Things are stirring, gentlemen. Been to One Broadway. Hope none of you suffer from seasickness."

"So it's that, after all," said an artillery officer. "Then Sir Henry Clinton will command here. I'll hang myself if they leave me behind."

"They started making the rounds of the prisons this afternoon trying to get the rebels to sign the rolls. Three chaps in the Presbyterian church in Wall street enlisted and took the oath; then backed down when they got outside. Said they did it just to get a mouthful of fresh air. They soon learned it was a firing squad, or a noose, for a deserter, and they had to go along. But they'll never live to see the Chesapeake." This from a captain of light horse.

"Probably our last night together here. Let's make it lively," urged Saleby.

"And I suggest an early start," I said.

All agreed to take horse after we had finished a bowl of punch then brewing. The younger men chattered away like magpies, very happy to shift cities. One or two of the older men looked grave. One asked me if I had arranged to enter the service, and before I could answer Saleby was complaining:

"It's a blighting shame, but all he thinks of is northern service up among those cursedly tall trees and wolves! People in our colony of Virginia take to woods and wild creatures as naturally as a trooper to strong drink. He'd rather fight the Oneidas than to make love to pretty Quakeresses."

"But the Oneidas are neutral," said Betler.

"They'll take the path when brave Burgoyne's red men sweep down through the northern forest. Then I'll get a crack at them," I said.

The punch arrived and the next fifteen minutes were consumed in drinking the king's health and damnation to all rebels. Next came toasts of a sentimental nature. Audrey Betworth was given by initials with much sincerity. Saleby whispered to me:

"I've been forgetting Osmond. Almost sorry we're going out to your place tonight. Maybe my last chance to see the saucy baggage."

"Lucky with women unlucky at cards," I reminded him.

"Gad! That's so. But I'll stick to the cards tonight."

Our aside was interrupted by the men facing the door rising. We followed the example and turned to find it was Colonel Wentsel. He had none of the convivial air. Saleby was glaring feebly, vaguely remembering the colonel might have been responsible for the reprimand. To prevent a scene I said—

Montreal
Sorel
Chambly
St. John
L. Champlain
Crown Pt.
Ticonderoga
L. George
Ft. George
Ft. Edward
Johnson Hal.
L. ONTARIO
Oswego
Ft. Niagara
Ft. Stanwix
Mohawk R.
Schenectady
Albany
Hudson R.
N.Y. City
Long Is.
Staten Is.
NEW JERSEY
Delaware R.

"You've changed your mind, I hope, Colonel, and are going with us."

"I must disappoint you all," he said, refusing a chair. "No passes for the Outward tonight."

"No passes! That means no passing!" cried Saleby in dismay.

"One might arrive at that conclusion," he sardonically replied.

"Then we must be taking to boat at once!" excitedly observed the artillery officer.

Colonel Wentsel eyed him balefully and said:

"I don't know what you are talking about. I don't think you know, sir. The city is sealed up as the result of certain information received at headquarters."

The group was puzzled and vastly disappointed. Colonel Wentsel continued, and explained—

"There is a spy in the city."

His voice was harsh and therefore more guttural.

"I thought we always had spies with us," said Maugem.

"This one is very dangerous. General Howe will have him at the end of a rope, however."

"Then confusion to him for spoiling our night as well as for being a spy," I said. And the glasses were raised and emptied.

"That aged Baff person certainly must hate rebels," Saleby gloomily remarked.

"She bragged to the town major that she saw Hale hung and would see many another pretty fellow swing off," grimly growled the colonel.

The artillery officer shivered and mumbled—

"Awfully pleasant creature!"

"His Majesty's officers must use such tools as are at hand," was the colonel's sententious rejoinder. "Regret to have spoiled sport. Now I must be going. Hope to see you again, Mr. Kerry."

I replied in a similar vein, but there was something in his level stare which made me apprehensive. I had the feeling he was hostile to me, although I could imagine no reason why he should suspect me. Of course there was Mother Baff, who had seen me call at the Berce store, but that was before I adorned the splendor of my borrowed wardrobe. Again, Mother Baff had seen me when I went to the rescue of Bowen.

It was possible she had had some of her creatures follow me to the Betworth house. Even so, there was nothing in that little adventure which would link me up to the patriots' cause. But if she had recognized me in my new rôle as the man seeking entrance to the Berce store then most promptly would she accuse me. If she had done so, then her evidence had proven insufficient to proceeed upon and I would be let alone, but closely watched, until I established my innocence or betrayed my guilt. Yet I did not believe I was involved. My state of nerves made it natural for me to be overapprehensive, to misconstrue every glance, to detect a double meaning in the simplest of statements.

It was with distinct relief, however, that I saw Colonel Wentsel turn to leave us. Then he wheeled about and came back to the table and said to me:

"I was forgetting— A bit of good news to make up for having your evening spoiled. Your cousin, Captain Jasper Betworth, will be arriving in town any time. He was with the last of the outposts to withdraw from Jersey. He is to serve in the Queen's Rangers under Colonel Simcoe."

"Excellent!" I cried, forcing my voice to ring with gladness. "Here's health and happiness to Captain Betworth, prince of good fellows, as a brother of his adorable sister is bound to be!"

"Marvelously cleverly put!" cried Saleby. "A double toast, and only one name called. Blister me if we don't drink it double! Economize on names, old fellow, but never stint the rum."

Colonel Wentsel accepted a glass in honor of the lady and smiled slightly as he tossed it off.

"Once more I take my leave. You have my profound respect, Mr. Kerry, and a bit of my sympathy."

"Sympathy?" I repeated. "And for what, my dear colonel?"

"For being the fair lady's cousin, therefore out of the running."

"But cousins are not always barred. And I'm only a second cousin," I defended.

"They shall be barred!" passionately cried Saleby, creating much laughter.

I was becoming convinced that Wentsel, cold-blooded and direct of purpose, had taken a dislike to me. I must follow his lead unhesitatingly to sustain my rôle. I feared to do this, however, for it might lead me into an impasse, from which I could not safely retreat, while to attempt to press forward might mean ruin. Fortunately for my peace of mind he now left the room for good. His manner had impressed the others as being a bit unusual. The artillery officer said:

"These Anglicized Germans are odd fish. All for idiotic details and written reports. They turn their lives into so much machinery. I'll wager he keeps tabs on the amount of rum he drinks and strikes off an average once a month."

This created merriment, but Maugem protested—

"No one ever saw him drunk."

"They were drunk at Trenton last Christmas," jeered Saleby. "Whipped by a band of scarecrows."

"For ——'s sake, Saleby, hush!" whispered Betler, glancing fearfully around to see if any Hessian officers were within hearing.

The captain was not inclined to hush and only the timely arrival of food smothered his further criticism of the Hessians. Candles were brought, but all the candles between King's Bridge and Whitehall Slip could not dispel the shadow hovering over me.

I laughed and talked with my companions, but there were other guests they could not see; the bent form of Mother Baff, the cold-visaged Wentsel, the graceful, handsome Jasper Betworth (he must be such to be Mistress Audrey's brother), the brown-eyed Osmond maid with her pretty head puzzled over Ambrose Kerry, and last but not least there was old Socrates. When I volunteered for the work my task had seemed much simpler; and the dangers surrounding me were none of those I had anticipated.

The waiter handed me a piece of paper. I opened it and read—

Git out—Bucks.

"A love-note! Ye gods! He scarcely arrives before he receives *billet d'amour!* Where's the trysting place, Kerry?" cried Saleby.

I fed the paper into a candle and explained:

"Unfortunately this calls for no answer. Just a word from our town butler, announcing that all is ready in Bloomingdale for the evening's festivities. If you will excuse me, gentlemen, I'll trot up to the house and find a boy to carry word to him. If I can't entertain in Bloomingdale then I'll entertain in Broadway. And I must have the butler back to make things ready for us."

"But you'll return here?" eagerly asked Maugem. "It's to be faro and we'll take turns acting as bank."

"Strip me, old fellow! But you must come back," insisted Saleby, his watery gaze growing anxious. "I—we rely on you, you know."

"Depend upon it," I assured him with a knowing look. "Not only must I send word to the butler but I must replenish the exchequer. Faro is expensive I've always found."

"Ripping good! Weirdly sharp!" roared Saleby, most happy to know I went for funds for the two of us.

AT LAST I was in the free air, but unconscious of having passed through the ordinary. Bucks, of all persons! How and why was the wild rifleman in the city? That he should have trailed me about the streets was not so surprizing, but that he should have ventured into the tavern without being subjected to close questioning was most remarkable.

When we held the city his rifle, dress, long black hair and moccasins would not have attracted attention, but with Sir William in possession he would stick out like a sore thumb. The street was dark except for the occasional ruddy glow of a lantern. I did not attempt to look for him. I walked rapidly to the Betworth house and let myself in, and before I could turn to close the door a figure glided up the steps and entered.

"Hello, sarge. Warm night, ain't it?" greeted the well known voice.

"In God's mercy what do you do here?" I whispered, locking the door and leading him to the back of the house and into the butler's little room.

"I'm one of them danged rebel deserters that's hiding in the woods up 'round Rhinebeck and being fed by the Tories," he chuckled. "Got tired of it, and knowing the king would win I come down here to enlist."

I made sure the shades were snugly drawn and then lighted a candle and looked him over. He was dressed like a farm-hand, wore stout boots in place of moccasins. He had sacrificed his long hair and carried no rifle.

"It was dangerous for us both for you to send that message to me. Why did you take the risk?"

"I'm dryer'n a salt herring," he replied.

I found a bottle in a cupboard, some of Old Socrates' private stock, and waited until he had enjoyed a dash. With an appreciative smack he wiped his lips and explained:

"Not much risk. Got hold of a waiter outside. Told him I was a servant and gave him the note. It's like this: the Betworths, old lady and the gal, got away and are coming here.'"

"Impossible!"

"Mebbe it's a miracle, but it's true," he dryly replied. "General Arnold sent me to warn you to git out the minute he knew about it."

"But the guard? What was it doing?" I wrathfully demanded, for my life had hinged on the women being held.

"Old woman made off to be mighty sick. Heart went wrong. Captain Sant started to take her and her gal to headquarters where she could be doctored. Just before this the gal Betty slipped away and most of the men was looking for her. When the old woman had a fit her daughter said it was her heart kerflumoxing. We thought she was dying. We started her in the carriage. Sant galloped ahead to fetch back a saw-bones. That left two men with the carriage. Their hosses went lame—that's the real miracle, both lame at once—and the carriage got ahead. Then the driver in the darkness took a cross road. So you must git out."

"And the army? At Middlebrook?"

"Moved to Ramapo. General Washington is ready to jump when Howe tries for Albany."

"Howe sails for the Chesapeake on his way to Philadelphia."

"Lordy massy! But that's prime news!" he gasped. "We'll take it through the lines together."

"One of us must get through with it. But the city is sealed up. They are hunting me even now, without knowing whom they want. They know a spy is loose and there's no passing the barriers. I can't even attempt it until I have different clothes."

Bucks scratched his head and admitted:

"Them duds won't do. Got to be something rough'n ready. Dirt on your face—hair mussed up— Lem'me see." He was silent for a few moments, then said: "I'll forage a bit. I've got a relation near the Defeat of Brandywine on Golden Hill. Mebbe I can git some cast-offs from him. We must be out of the city before sunup. We can find cover in the hills and woods between here and King's Bridge."

"Go for the clothes. Leave by the back door. Come in that way. I'll show no light. If you see a light don't come in."

"I'll come in if the place is on fire," he growled as I led him to the back door.

"No foolishness, Bucks. If I'm caught, or in danger of being caught, you must take the word to Ramapo. Joseph Berce told me. I got it from other sources, also. Say I said there is no doubt about it."

"Don't talk like you was hung," he

snapped back. "A Morgan usually goes where he wants to. I'll be back soon."

The moment he was gone I began imagining the house had one or more stealthy occupants. Only when near the windows was it possible to discern objects, and I kept back from the windows. I had left my two Highland pistols in my room and my first move was to go for them. I pawed over the top of the dresser, where I had left them, but they were not there. My groping fingers soon came to a drawer half open, and a further examination satisfied me its contents had been overhauled.

I continued my investigation and found every drawer in the dresser had been rummaged. I did not dare to light a candle, and was about to give up my search when an outstretched hand struck a pistol on the bed. The two were lying close together. Whoever had ransacked the room had tossed them onto the bed. Taking the pistols and leaving my sword I crept into the hall. It was not likely my room had been visited after dark, as that would necessitate a light. But who had had the audacity to enter the house in the daytime?

I descended to the ground floor and wished for Bucks to come. I was suspected. My room had been searched. Mother Baff had visited headquarters. Any moment the house might be surrounded. The thought gave me a chilll and sent me to the back of the house, where I proposed hiding in the garden until my friend came back. The street remained quiet for what seemed to be hours, probably a matter of minutes. Then came a discordant note.

It was the murmur of voices, harsh and ugly, and coming from up the street. The confusion alone told me these could not be soldiers. I stole along some flowering shrubs until I could look up the street. The clamor came nearer and several specks of light, like lanterns being carried at a run bobbed up and down. Fascinated I held my position. A raucous voice was now audible above the others, and it was crying:

"God save the king! Hang the spy!"

My first thought that a street mob was hounding Bucks, and I drew my pistols to give the good fellow a chance. The clumping of feet increased and almost before I knew it the van of the pursuit was streaming by the house. First they came in twos and threes, separated by irregular intervals, and yet I had not observed the quarry. Then came a compact body of men and a few women, wild creatures who belonged to Canvas Town.

"Faster, my dears! Faster! A gold-piece for those who catch him, free rum for all. Faster before the soldiers catch him! A sweet night's work!"

There was no mistaking the voice; and as old Mother Baff brought up the tail-end of the chase I could even hear the *tap-tap* of her long staff. By the house they swept and much relieved to learn Bucks was not their victim I stole back to the rear door and collided with a dark figure.

"Bucks!" I whispered, and even as I spoke I knew the figure was too slight for my friend. The unknown attempted to wrench away from me, but I secured a firm grip and dragged him inside the house.

"Stop it, or I'll knock your head off!" I warned, now discovering the fellow was quite helpless in my hands.

My strength crumbled away and left me helpless when for answer there came a whimpering sob. Leading my prisoner into the butler's room I closed the door and lighted the candle. I had captured Betsy Osmond and she was dressed as she had been when she stole through the garden to gain Mistress Audrey's room.

"And it was you those devils were chasing?" I faintly asked.

She crouched against the wall in the corner and nodded her head and fought to stifle her sobbing.

"I was leaving the city—to go back to the Betworths. They chased me—turned me back."

"When did you get those clothes back? Yes, I know you left them in your mistress's room."

She stole a glance at me and hung her head. "When I told you I'd come for my things," she answered in a weak voice.

"And went away without anything," I reminded her.

"Old Socrates had the bundle. He went out the back door and gave them to me after I'd left the house. You see, sir, I had to have them if I would get back to my mistress."

"You should have been patient. I have been informed that my kinswomen are now on their way here. Seems they escaped from the rebels."

"Escaped?" she whispered, glaring about. "How can you know that?"

"You don't seem to rejoice over the good news."

"Because I don't believe it. I love my mistress dearly. You must let me go now."

"Why?"

"Because you claim to be gentle born. Because I can't go out dressed like this again. If my mistress is coming I will wait for her here. Open the door, please."

Her disguise was dangerous. I stood back and insisted:

"But you must promise to show no light until you get to your room and have drawn the shades close. Also you must return here. There's something queer about this. I want the truth."

She lifted her head and stared at me curiously, her red lips twisting and a suggestion of a suppressed smile in the brown eyes so recently filled with tears. She had lost her hat in our scuffle at the back door and the brown locks were much disheveled and showed glints of copper in the candle-light. "Something queer about my wanting to join my mistress? There are queerer things than that, Mr. Ambrose Kerry."

"Aye! As to what?"

"Why, namely that another Ambrose Kerry should have reached New York not more than thirty minutes before I entered this house."

I WAS nonplused, but not alarmed. Then I began laughing; her attempt to frighten me was too ridiculous.

"You young simpleton, why do you speak such arrant nonsense? There is but one Ambrose Kerry. I am he. What do you take me for?"

"For an impostor!" she shrilly denounced. "What you are and what your purposes may be I don't know. But you are not Ambrose Kerry, of Norfolk, Virginia."

"Are you crazy?" I sternly demanded. "Are you trying to throw dust over your own actions? Go to the town major and tell your silly story. See if he is impressed. And they do put women in prison, you know."

"And they do hang impostors," she instantly rejoined, but speaking more quietly.

"You impudent little baggage! If it wasn't for the mob getting you I'd put you outdoors just as you are."

"Ambrose Kerry has just reached New York," she doggedly persisted. There was no shaking her. I tried another tack.

"Magnificent! I suppose you told him of the impostor in this house. It's queer he hasn't hastened here to show me up."

"He did not see me. I did not wish him to see me. He may come any moment. You had best leave at once."

"Tut, tut. A moment ago you were saying they hung impostors."

"I say it again. You are not Ambrose Kerry. I have tried to remember who you remind me of—I can't do it."

"And when did you know I wasn't the genuine Kerry?" I mockingly asked, but with no heart in the game I was trying to play."

"The first time I saw you in this house."

"As positive then as you are now?" I knew how she would answer before she spoke.

"Yes. Old Socrates knows it too. I didn't tell him; but he knows it."

"Then headquarters must know it."

She shook her head slowly.

"I don't think so. That is, headquarters didn't know it up to a short time ago. If Kerry has had time to reach there they now know two men claim the name with the weight of their suspicion against you. We both waste precious time. May I retire to my room?"

"I am Ambrose Kerry," I insisted. "Yes; go, but show no light. Remember I am Ambrose Kerry."

She halted in the doorway and studied me intently, and said:

"The time will soon come when I shall tell you who you are. I've almost had it since I entered this room."

"You are hopeless."

She ran up the hall without making any reply.

I went to the back door and stood outside and listened for Bucks' soft step. Now the horrid fear possessed me that the poor fellow had been caught, and the greater fear that no word of my discovery would get through to General Washington in time to serve his purpose. Suddenly I realized it was most important the girl should be clear of the house before the rifleman came, for she would recognize him instantly, and through him identify me. And it would be no Canvas Town mob I would find at my heels.

She seemed gone overlong and I stole back into the house to see if she had departed by the front door. The moment I entered the long hall I knew something was wrong. A path of light emanated from the room across from the butler's room and extended across the hall. I drew a pistol and leaped for the open door.

The girl was standing before the blazing fireplace stirring up something afire in the fireplace. She heard me and wheeled and aimed a pistol at my head. The weapon was long and heavy and of large bore, of a pattern preferred by the Spaniards to the south. I marveled that so small a hand and wrist could hold it so steadily. She was dressed as a maid and there was an expression of deadly earnestness in her small face as she confronted me.

"Drop your pistol and sit down," she softly commanded.

"I have never met a woman who would kill in cold blood," I said, yet tossing my weapon on to a small divan. "I must see what you are burning."

"Not even the genuine Kerry could do that. Try it and I shoot."

"I can't believe you'll shoot me."

With that I made a rush for the fireplace; and the hammer of the huge pistol clicked venomously. Before she could make a second essay I wrested the weapon from her grasp and holding her with one hand attempted to investigate the burning papers. With a feline snarl she raised the poker she had been holding. I threw up my arm to fend off the blow and she cleverly extended her lithe form and thrust the poker far forward, like a duelist lunging, separating the mass of papers and setting them to burning more fiercely than ever.

It was the devil's mystery, and Bucks might come in any time and betray my identity. With small gentleness I yanked the poker from her grasp and still holding her began clawing at the charred mass. The papers crumbled at my touch. I gave it up and released her. She stood panting for breath, one hand caressing her wrist, her eyes afire.

"You miserable coward!" she painfully exclaimed.

I seized her by both shoulders and yearned to shake her.

"What were you burning?" I demanded.

"You're a beast and bully," she softly said.

"Harsh language even for a lady's maid, who sometimes wears breeches. For the last time I ask what were you burning?"

"Oh, la!" she mocked. "For the last time! Quite like the playhouse. Well, your lordship, I was burning papers, papers I did not wish you and some others to see. And now I'm going."

I wanted her to go. I feared a meeting between her and Bucks. High praise from her Tory mistress would be hers if she could give me into custody. And yet there was the genuine Kerry to be explained. She knew him and had known him before I borrowed his name. She darted toward the door but I threw my arm about her waist and drew her down beside me on the divan and said—

"Mistress Osmond, you may go when you explain about the two Kerrys now in New York."

With a little cry she went limp and in dismay I released her, thinking she had swooned. Instantly her right hand shot out and seized my discarded pistol, and she was triumphantly crying—

"Now, you impostor, I say I am going out of this house."

Her ruse angered me, and I ducked and grabbed at her hand. The charge exploded and my wig gave a jump.

"Oh, I didn't mean to fire!" she sobbed, trying to pull away from me, and my wig flew off. I secured both her hands. She ceased struggling and her eyes became distended in amazement, and she astounded me by whimpering:

"You! You! Now I know!"

Some one was trying the front door; tentatively at first, then impatiently.

* * *

I CLAPPED on my wig and secured my pistol. She darted into the hall and back to the rear door. I followed her and whispered for her to wait. Once she was through the door and in the garden I lost her within fifty feet of the house. I gave my attention to the house, wondering who could be trying the street door. Perhaps some passerby, attracted by the muffled report of my Highland pistol. Had the genuine Kerry told his story to the town major there would be no parleying at the front of the house. The place would have been surrounded in silence and when the maid and I ran from the back door we would have been bagged before we had gone a dozen feet. But that stealthy testing of the door-knob had given me my fill of the place.

It was suddenly become a house of ill omen. I wished Bucks were back. Then I thought of an explanation which was as simple as it was gratifying. The convivial company at the tavern had expected my speedy return. Captain Saleby could not tilt with Fortuna until he was in funds. My failure to return had brought him after me. This decision was very comforting; nor was I disturbed on hearing the back door creak. I had heard no one approach and this was a tribute to Bucks' woodcraft.

I glided in pursuit, for if the good fellow failed to find me on the ground floor he would be much alarmed. He was not in the butler's room, nor in the den where the fireplace still gave off some light. I passed down the hall and heard a movement at the head of the stairs. I swiftly ascended to the second floor, but the hall seemed to be deserted. I depended on my ears and not my eyes to learn this. Believing the rifleman had continued his search for me to the third floor I waited for him to return. A door opened a dozen feet away, the door of Audrey Betworth's chamber.

"What the —— are you doing in there?" I softly demanded.

There was a bit of silence, and then the cautious query—

"Who is it?"

"Morgan, you crazy man. Hurry up!"

My answer was a deafening explosion and the swish of a heavy ball which shattered something of glass on the wall above my head. I was completely nonplused and involuntarily exclaimed—

"Bucks!"

There came a second shot, and my sluggish wit at last awoke to the fact it was not the rifleman I was meeting. There came a rush of feet for the stairs, and I crouched low, knowing my assailant must be unarmed now except, possibly, for a knife. We came together a few feet from the head of the stairs, and the impetus of his advance carried us rolling down the flight. As we brought up in the hall he struck with his heavy pistol and tore off my wig. We came to our feet, he striving to gain the front door and I endeavoring to prevent his escape. Suddenly he took the aggressive, fighting like a madman, the fury of his attack carrying me to the foot of the stairs, where my heels struck the bottom step.

I went down on my back, well near cracking my spine. As I fell I drew up a leg and kicked at random, catching him in the chest and causing him to grunt most dolefully. Again we clinched and went to the floor, rolling over and over, and this time toward the back end of the hall. He tried to throttle me, but I drove my fists up between his wrists and swept his hands from my throat. My hand caught in his hair, which to my surprize he was wearing long and tied behind. I forced his head back with this grip and thrust my right wrist under his chin.

He groaned but endured the torment long enough to strike me a tremendous blow on the side of the head. I must have let go his hair for the next I knew he was on all fours and squirming from between my arms, his heels raising the —— with my shins. Then we were erect once more and almost within the faint zone of light emanating from the fireplace. He struck at me and I dodged and countered, moving by instinct, the darkness preventing anything more than a vague sense of motion. We fought blindly and one blow sent him against a wall mirror, which crackled but did not fall from the frame. He was back at me in a second and my blows went wild.

Then his head butted me in the midriff, and I went down with the wind whistling from my lungs. I was helpless. He located me with his foot and then dropped on his knees and drove his knife into the floor close to my side. My fingers closed on his wrist as he attempted to free the weapon.

My strength was scant but sufficient to delay him, and while we struggled I was regaining my wind. He, too, was badly blown, for now he shifted his tactics and tried to break away. As he rose to his feet he carried me with him. Did he manage to pass through the front door I would have the city at my heels immediately. We were now doing little more than clinging to each other and striking feeble blows. We were close by the room where the girl burned the papers.

I was trying to work him into this room and he must have concluded to try the back door, for as I pushed against him he abruptly gave ground, so that I almost went to my knees. We reeled to the door of the room and with a final effort I flung him across the threshold. We collided with the table and went to the floor within a few feet of the fireplace. I was uppermost and reached for the poker to give him the quietus. Then, by the light of the fire, for the first time I beheld his countenance.

I dropped the poker and released him, stupidly exclaiming—

"Captain Sant!"

He gained his feet and harshly cried:

"Ambrose Kerry, you fool! And I can't go back to the rebels so long as you live!" He jumped for the door and bumped into Bucks, who cried:

"Cap'n Sant! What'n tarnation——"

Sant hurled him one side and raced for the street door.

"Stop him! Kill him!" I cried.

Although he understood nothing of the situation Bucks was quick to respond and ran down the hall, I following more tardily. As Sant reached the door the knocker rose and fell and voices called out. Before we could stop him Sant had turned the key and passed out. Bucks closed and relocked the door at once. Through the sidelight I beheld a group of soldiers, one of them carrying a lantern. Before Sant could open his mouth they seized him. He fought them as fiercely as his spent strength would permit, and managed to gasp:

"You fools! I am Captain Ambrose Kerry. Inside there——"

But a soldier cracked him with the barrel of his musket and as his form went limp, shouted:

"We know who you are, you —— rebel spy! Changed your fine clothes, thinking to git away." Two men supported the prisoner, and a voice of authority commanded:

"Sergeant, bring the men from the rear of the house. Take the prisoner to the Bridewell. Forward!"

I clutched Bucks' wrists and drew him down the hall to the back door.

"What'n —— does this mean?" he whispered.

"Sant is the leak. He's been supplying the British with information. We are free until he can tell a connected story and identify himself to some one from headquarters. The town major has him now. Only one or two high officers know his secret. He must get in touch with one of them."

"So that's the way it goes, eh? Think of any one being so cussed mean as to spy. Sorry, sarg, but you ain't a regular spy. You're—you're just a Morgan, scouting a bit. Let's git outdoors where we'll have more room. Left the clothes at the back door."

As we stole into the shrubbery the night's dénouement stirred Bucks more keenly, as though he was realizing the situation by degrees.

"Suffering alligators! Cap'n Sant! My head's busting!"

"His chase of the Betworths was all a game. He's the genuine Ambrose Kerry, their cousin. They went to the Jerseys to meet him and receive his batch of information. His chase of them was all a game. He passed over his papers when he caught them. They were to bring his report to town. General Arnold spoiled it by detaining them. He had to change his plans, either bringing or sending his news. And before leaving the American Army he planned the women's escape."

"But why did he come here before going to his friends at headquarters?" mumbled Bucks.

The question was very relevant, but it helped me to explain much that seemed inexplicable.

"He sent the papers by Betsy Osmond, the maid. He came here to get them back. The girl burned the papers just before he arrived. Had he gone to headquarters first I would be wearing a rope within forty-eight hours."

CHAPTER V

THE ONE WAY OUT

WE CUT across to New Street but did not enter it, preferring to keep parallel to it until we believed we were outside any circle that troops thrown around the Betworth house would form. Not until then did I dare halt and change my clothing for the uncouth garments Bucks had brought. My pistols and gold pieces were all I shifted to my new disguise. The discarded finery was buried under some rubbish. In place of Cousin Jasper's exquisite lace-trimmed hat I put on a ragged, shapeless thing which would have disgraced a scarecrow. I felt thoroughly disreputable, but Bucks insisted on smearing my face, hands and arms with dirt. Then he mussed my hair with his grimy fingers.

Satisfied with my appearance we struck into New and followed it to Wall, planning to gain Broadway. As the greater part of the city lay east of Broadway I was for making Greenwich Village, quitting the city near the Bayard Hill fort of the American occupation, thus following the old river road, General Putnam's line of retreat the preceding year when it was supposed his garrison troops must be captured.

Bucks did not care as to which point we left the city but insisted we must lose no time in escaping through the neck of the bottle, King's Bridge, ahead of the alarm. He suggested that it might be easier to make the eastern limits of the city and escape through Bowery Lane under cover of night. Then if we could steal horses from some outlying farm and gain the hollow in the hills known as McGowan's Pass we would stand an excellent chance of dashing through to Spuyten Duyvil Creek and win clear to Westchester county.

As we entered Wall Street we found evidences of much excitement, and the task of escaping from the city before morning appeared to be less simple than we had pictured. Dragoons were galloping toward Broadway, also up Nassau and Smith. And I had no doubt they were patrolling Queen Street, as that portion of Pearl just above Hanover Square was then commonly called. Besides the usual night rabble there were groups of decent citizens, very voluble, as if alive with eagerness to witness some rare spectacle. We mixed with these and I whispered to Bucks that the men riding east were sent to prevent my escape through the Lane.

"And those riding west?" he asked.

"To block me from getting by the Bayard Hill fort. Within an hour the whole northern boundary of the city will be lined with soldiers."

"With big rewards offered for your sculp," he mused.

"One of us must get through. I think it will be you. They don't know you."

"They won't know you as you look now. We'll both git through. We'll go to my place on Golden Hill, where I left my rifle, eat 'n' sleep, and then try a new plan that's just popped into my head. Never do what the other feller thinks you will. They think you'll try to break through tonight."

I caught his arm and dragged him back from the edge of the road. Colonel Wentsel trotted by, riding toward Knyphausen's headquarters. His errand had to do with me. He and the others who had dined and wined with me would realize the importance of capturing me. They were remembering how they had discussed General Howe's plans in my presence.

Bucks resented my attempting to hide. The boldest course was the best, and with a chuckle he added—

"If you could see yourself you wouldn't fret any. You look worse'n the devil. Hold up your head and gawk all you want to. They're looking for a feller in gay clothes. Now for Maiden Lane and an open approach to my room on Golden Hill."

So we went on, and every step convinced me more and more that one would need wings to escape from the city this night. Nor did the morrow promise us anything. I dreaded it as the condemned dread execution day.

"It'll be your new plan, or the noose," I said.

"It's a good plan, sarge. Just a case of hiding where they'd never expect to find us. Injun trick. Being a Morgan you'll like it. But first I've got to git that rifle if I have to ram through the whole British army."

The nearer we drew to Golden Hill the more lively became the street life. The search for the bogus Ambrose Kerry was being conducted with frantic thoroughness. Torches and lanterns were everywhere, and at irregular intervals small fires were burning in the street for greater illumination. When we were within a few houses of The Defeat At Brandywine, Bucks turned down a lane and led me to the rear of a mean building and entered an open door. Several rooms opened off the small filthy hall, the doors of which were open and the mean interiors fitfully lighted by candles.

Bucks ushered me into a small apartment, villainous in appointments. I made to close the door as he lighted a candle, but he objected, saying:

"Nothing to hide. You're my cousin from Westchester village. I'm trying to git you to enlist. Mebbe you ain't very bright in the head, but bright enough to hold back a bit."

Once more I told him of Howe's real purpose and named Berce as my authority for the information. In a whisper he repeated the message over until I was satisfied he knew it as well as I. One of us ought to win through. In the hall and on the floor above was much singing and loud talking, the place being a rooming-house. No regard was paid to a guest's antecedents provided he paid his room hire in advance. Several rough-looking fellows thrust their heads in at the door and with drunken solemnity engaged us in a rambling conversation. Bucks responded most genially, and with a kick admonished me to be garrulous.

"Lot of noise over one danged spy," remarked a loutish fellow.

"You'd think the whole rebel army was in town," laughed Bucks.

"They'll soon catch him," I contributed. "Who is he, anyway?"

"Some uppity officer that's sold out to the rebels."

"Lord's mercy! Never knew the rebels had enough money—hard money—to buy meal, let alone buying a British officer," cried Bucks.

"Some say it's a woman," spoke up another. "Others say it's a young man, scurcely more'n a boy. In Canvas Town they're sayin' as how old Mother Baff is gittin' a fortune in gold by findin' spies for the British."

"Aye, she's a shrewd one," admired a third of our guests.

"But it's bad for her to have it know'd she's gittin' gold," was the first speaker's remark.

"She got a pretty mess of the golden boys for turnin' over old Berce," mused the fellow who seemed more interested in the beldame's gains than in the spy. "She'd never take no continental money."

This drove the conversation into a speculative field, Bucks displaying a keen relish in trying to estimate just how much blood money the hag had received. The four of them argued and agreed, disputed and compromised, but the conclusion of all their talk was that Mother Baff had a large hoard of gold hidden somewhere. The younger man of the three regretfully added:

"Too bad the Canvas Town gang had to spoil her chances tonight. If they'd kept off she'd have got another spy that would 'a' paid her rich."

"What spy was that?" I inquired, fully expecting him to name Ambrose Kerry, the imposter.

"The man who was old Berce's messenger," was the astounding answer.

I was incapable of speech, this revelation was so grotesque. Betsy Osmond had escaped Mother Baff's friends by taking refuge in the Betworth house, but that she had been hunted as a spy rather than as a victim of foot-pads had never entered my imagination. Nor could I now make myself believe it. Our callers withdrew and I remained indifferent to Bucks's remarks as I sought to put the puzzle together.

My disquieting meditations ended with a decision to say nothing about the maid to my friend just yet, and we turned in for a few hours' sleep. The rifleman believed my silence was due to my fears for the morrow and I did not attempt to dissuade him from this belief. He insisted on taking the floor and giving me the cot. He was asleep almost at once while I remained awake reviewing the momentous change in my affairs and the possible part the maid had played in the game. The Betworths' visit to Jersey was due to the fact that Jasper Betworth was stationed there, and, what was more vital, because it would afford the genuine Ambrose Kerry, alias Captain Sant, a chance to use them as messengers for delivering an important budget of news to General Howe. This information would include a statement as to General Washington's inability to decide what his opponent proposed doing next.

With the discovery that I had imposed on my officer acquaintances was the more disturbing realization that I would be in position to dispel General Washington's doubt as to Howe's next move. This much was clear enough, but Betsy Osmond's status was inexplicable. I believed she had acted as messenger in bringing Sant's report to New York, taking the place of Madame Betworth, or of her young mistress. Very possibly one of the Betworth women had urged her to undertake the task. How could she act as messenger for them and also for the merchant Berce? One glimmer of light was her declaration that she had seen and had avoided Sant when he entered the city.

Her return to the Betworth house and the destruction of certain papers might be construed to mean she had faithfully brought the information to the city and had kept it concealed in the house as a protection should her loyalty be questioned. Then came Sant, or Kerry, and she had hastened to burn the papers preliminary to leaving the city for good.

If this were true she had acted foolishly, for he would have the gist of the news in his head, and if it were bound to reach the British she should have made capital out of it by delivering it in person. As the matter stood, if she was Berce's messenger, her predicament must be as sorry as mine. And none of this groping for the truth in any way tended to explain who had searched my room, an act committed before Sant arrived in town. Had the maid made the search she would have been more discreet. The rough and tumble condition of the dresser strongly suggested a man, one in a hurry at that.

BUCKS aroused me from a troubled sleep at an early hour. His angular face was good-humored in expression and entirely care free. He refused me the use of soap and water, and explained:

"I've thought it all out. You're Job Merick, a sort of a cousin. You're from Westchester village. I've hornswoggled you into coming to town to enlist, so's I can make two guineas. Now we'll have a pick-up breakfast, and you'll remember you're a countryman." He examined the rough cot to make sure his rifle was safely concealed (my first inkling it was there, although the narrow bed was cursedly hard on one side) and we went forth into the sunlight.

There was a small coffee-house near the tavern, where the light of purse and shabby of clothes resorted. This we entered and purchased some coarse but hearty food. After we had eaten Bucks led me to a broadside fastened to the dingy wall and indicated I was to read it.

Following my finger I slowly spelled it out, half-aloud. It announced:

> "All aspiring heroes now have the opportunity to distinguish themselves by joining the Queen's Rangers Huzzas, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Simcoe. Every spirited young man will receive every encouragement, immediately mounted on an elegant horse, furnished with clothing and accoutrements to the amount of forty guineas, by applying to Cornet Spencer at his quarters, 1033 Water street, or his rendezvous, Hewitt's Tavern near the Coffee House, and the Defeat At Brandywine on Golden Hill. Whoever brings a recruit shall instantly receive two guineas. *Vivent Rex et Regina!*"

"A beautiful chance! Beautiful!" huskily declared a waiter as I finished and remained to stare stupidly at the bill. "I'll take the young gem'man round to Cornet Spencer. No trouble. Love to do it for the king, God bless him!"

"Hi, you keep shut and clear of us," growled Bucks. "Don't you go to putting your fingers in my pie. When any one gits two guineas for my cousin taking the service I cal'late it'll be me."

"I spoke first," sullenly insisted the waiter, eying me greedily.

"You're a liar, you flat-chested houn'! I spoke to him afore he come here. He stayed with me ever since coming here."

"Yes, my cousin has pestered me to take the service," I said. "Guess I'll think it over a bit. Two guineas seems a awful lot to go to a man not enlisting."

The waiter spat in deep disgust and shouldered away. Bucks whispered:

"It says horses. We might need them horses."

"All promises are golden," I reminded from the corner of my mouth. "Once we are in we may find horseflesh scarce."

"Sarge, I'm plumb skeered. Something is going to bust loose today. I feel it in my bones. If we was snugly tucked away on the rolls of the Queen's Rangers I don't believe we'd be spotted."

"Once we enlist we'll be tied down. The news must go through to Washington. We'll save it as our last chance."

We left the place and sauntered toward the tavern, I remembering to display bucolic interest in all I saw. Despite the early hour a squad of recruits was being marched away by a sergeant. Citizens were stirring and we passed officers who looked as though they had been up all night and not at cards or drink, either. We walked on to Fulton but found no seclusion there. The streets seemed to thrill with suppressed excitement. More citizens turned out and fell to discussing the night's doings.

As we loitered near one group I heard a man indignantly proclaim:

"They searched my house. They came before any of us was up. Scared my wife most to death."

"They'll search every house in the city. They got their orders," cried another. "And the five hundred guineas' reward has sent all Canvas Town scurrying about like rats. Just the luck for some of that scum to get the money."

Bucks whispered:

"I'm skeered. Something tells me we oughter go back to the tavern."

We turned back and loitered before the tavern, and the same kind of talk was to be heard here. A group about a tree drew our attention and we lounged near enough to see it was a bill, hastily painted with black paint and brush. A fair description of me as I appeared when posing as Ambrose Kerry was given, together with an offer of five hundred guineas for me alive, two hundred for me dead.

"If any one gits that it'll be old Mother Baff. She's inside there now," growled a citizen.

"Good lack! But she do have the run of where her betters are kicked out," complained another.

Old Mother Baff was the last person I cared to meet and I turned to walk back to Fulton Street. Bucks caught my arm and forced me to continue our lounging gait, and whispered for me to keep my mouth open. We were opposite the tavern when I saw her white head, bowed low, and she was about to come through the doorway. I turned my back on the entrance and began pointing to the building across the way. The *tap-tap* of the long staff made the back of my neck feel cold. Now she was close behind us and I was hoping she would pass without heeding us when she broke into a cackling laugh, and I heard her softly mutter—

"Dirt ahind the ears and a white neck where it sets on the shoulders."

Next she was beside me, pawing back her straggling hair and peering up into my face. I glanced at her blankly, then shifted my gaze as I pointed out some new wonder for Bucks to explain.

"You look like some one I know, dear," she croaked.

I gaped at her stupidly. She made a move to pass on, but there must have been something reminiscently familiar in my features, for she pressed closer and again shook back the tangled ropes of hair.

"Your featur's look like what I've seen before, dear," she persisted.

"Git away, old lady," gruffly commanded Bucks. "You're slowing us up from 'listing."

"Speak softly to the old, dear," she said with a leer. "Hands brown, but never by city air." Then to me, "Your skin's white, dear, where the sun ain't touched it." She reached forward a withered hand and rested it where my arm showed through a rent in my ragged coat; and it burned like fire. I growled and shook her hand off. It fell against my side and I felt the fingers rest on the butt of my Highland pistol.

"God's mercy!" she faintly cried and hobbled away from me.

I sent my elbow into Bucks' side as a signal that the situation was becoming desperate. Already the group about the tree were making toward us. Bucks took my arm and led me into the tavern and in a loud voice called for Cornet Spencer. The officer was called down-stairs and proved to be a red-cheeked youngster, scarcely more than a boy. He walked with an exaggerated swagger, and said to us:

"What is it, my man? Two good loyalists I can easily see."

"I fetched him here to 'list," announced Bucks. "I'm after them two guineas."

"Native thrift and shrewdness," said the cornet admiringly. "We'll soon have your two names on the rolls."

"There's a matter of two guineas for this recruit," persisted Bucks. Behind me came the *tap-tap* of the long staff. I did not look around but I could feel her evil presence behind me even before I heard her hurried breathing. "Two guineas," repeated Bucks firmly.

"Curse it! Can't you wait until the man's name is down?" Then more graciously, for we were birds in the bush as yet. "Just a bit of form to sign your names. His Majesty is glad to pay the guineas. Now, Mother Baff; stand aside, please. That's a good creature."

"We come way from Westchester village. I'm Will Bucks. This is my cousin, Job Merick. He didn't want to come. But I fetched him. It's worth a dozen guineas to fight his notions, him being that given to backing and filling. So's if you want this settled now, young sir, I'll collect my guineas before we write down our names."

"Have it so! Have it so! But draw me, if you aren't a cautious blade! You're after my own heart. You know what you want. Come back to the table and we'll settle this business before a porter can drink a pint. A shilling apiece to bind the bargain, and two guineas for my sturdy recruiting agent."

He led us to the table and Mother Baff kept close behind us, determined to see the end of it. A sergeant brought the rolls. Now I ventured to steal a glance at Mother Baff and was pleased to observe perplexity wrinkling her face. We received a shilling apiece and Bucks was given the two guineas after which we wrote our names.

"You write like a clerk, dear," croaked old Mother Baff, grinning maliciously as I was compelled to meet her sharp gaze.

"Run along, Mother. Your charms will make my men forget their duties," said the cornet, whereat there was much coarse laughter.

"Aye? You'll be forgetting your duties pretty soon, my pretty dear. You'll wish you were wise like old Mother Baff, dear. You'd like five hundred guineas to lose at cards, dear." And with that enigmatical statement she made for the door.

"What the devil does the old hag mean?" muttered the cornet. "Up to some sharp game, I'll warrant."

"It's all up," I murmured in Bucks' ear. At once he was requesting:

"I have a matter of a gun hidden near here, and I'd like to go and fetch it."

"You'll receive seventy-nine lashes if you stir from this place until given permission, my two-guinea man," snarled the cornet. Then to the waiting sergeant:

"Take them out back with the rest. See they don't wander."

VIRTUALLY prisoners we were conducted to a green back of the tavern. A score of other recruits were stretched out on the grass, some asleep, some moodily meditative, some loquacious with drink.

"Now hand over them guineas!" hoarsely commanded the sergeant, a beef and ale sort of a fellow.

"My two guineas?" shrilly cried Bucks.

"That'll do, my hearty. Fork over."

I heard a soft laugh over my head and back of me. It was the cornet, standing by the open window and awaiting for the old game to be played on my friend.

"They're mine. I think I'll keep 'em," said Bucks.

"I'm watching you do it, my lad. Hand over or I'll prick your inwards." And the fellow picked up a musket and deftly removed the bayonet and advanced the point menacingly until it all but pricked Bucks' abdomen. "Come, I'm waiting, my lad. Don't move; you can't dodge this."

Bucks ruefully fished out the guineas and held them on a level with his chin. "Can't never dodge this," repeated the sergeant, brandishing the bayonet and much pleased with his jest.

"You can't dodge this, neither," drawled Bucks, and he thrust forward his hand, two fingers separated and extended, one for each of the sergeant's eyes.

With a scream of pain the fellow dropped the bayonet and began whirling about, his hands clasped over his eyes. Some of the recruits began crawling to their feet. To them Bucks explained: "You can dodge one finger poked at your face, but you can't dodge two. Can't be did."

"You tore his eyes out!" cried one of the men.

"No; just made 'em a trifle sore. He'll shed some tears, then he'll be all right. But his eyesight won't ever git strong enough for him to see me giving up my two lawfully earned guineas."

"I'll make you wish you was in ——," sobbed the sergeant.

"Wait till you git your sight back," soothed Bucks.

"Strip 'em! The guineas for drink-money. At 'em, men," cried the sergeant.

There was a general movement in our direction. We gave ground until close to the tavern. Bucks snatched up the bayonet. I picked up a broken pikestaff. When the recruits would have crowded in I used the stick as a rapier and poked a fellow in the chest and caught another in the neck. So well did my defense work that none ventured near enough to feel Bucks' bayonet.

From the open window the cornet lustily cried out:

"Boil me! But that was clever. You two shall have a dram for that and the king shall pay the shot. You, sergeant, there! You'll be wanting to wear a queer pattern on your back, sirrah! You two gamey lads come in and lick up a dram. Give Colonel Simcoe a regiment such as you and we'll sweep the colonies clean of rebels."

Thus we returned to the cornet's high favor. We entered the ordinary and had our dram of rum, his Majesty standing treat. But there was no relish for me in our new popularity, for as I drank I discerned Mother Baff standing near the open window looking onto the green. I had supposed she had gone, but now she was back, more malignant than ever. She passed to the door as the cornet was dismissing us to the green. There was a new glitter in her small eyes. We were at her heels as she went down the steps, bent far over, and she was snickering in great glee. And I heard her joyfully muttering:

"Used a pike like an officer! White skin where the coat pulls down at the neck and pulls up on the arms!"

"Old Mother is all a-grin. Some one's got to suffer," jeered a lounger by the horse-block.

"Perhaps, dear, she's thinking of the time when you'll be turned off," she called back at him. "Perhaps she knows where five hundred guineas are to be found. But your head won't ever be worth enough to pay for the rope that stretches your ugly neck, dear."

The man by the block stared after her and exclaimed:

"She's sister to the ——! I'll wager a pot of cider she lands this runaway spy the so'jers are breaking their necks to catch."

As we were turning the corner of the tavern Bucks softly whispered:

"Do as you want to, sarge, but my advice is you don't take up that wager. She's spotted you. She don't know for sure, but she's suspicious enough to make the charge. If she gits it wrong nothing will happen to her. If she hits it right she knows it's worth five hundred guineas. She'll die rich if she keeps on."

"Let's sneak away and make a break," I urged.

"There's no rush like that. She won't trust any one. She'll go to headquarters to make her own report. She don't 'low to share the reward with any one. She reckons we're as snug here as if we was in the Provost. It'll take some time for her to reach headquarters and lead the soldiers back. She won't send 'em on ahead for fear some one will claim some of the blood-money."

We returned to the little green and fell to studying the best line for a sudden flight. I also pictured Mother Baff hobbling to Number One Broadway to impart her news. I could see the interest aroused at headquarters when she entered and announced the purpose of her visit. I could visualize the eager courtesy with which she would be greeted, and the zest with which the genuine Kerry would accompany the soldiers sent to arrest me.

Never did the minutes gallop so fast as when we lounged there on the turf, idly answering queries put by our late foes. The sergeant, red of eyes, but greatly reduced in spirits, offered us no incivilities. His broad red face rather wore a hurt, reproachful look, which under different circumstances would have been very humorous.

The men began climbing to their feet and Bucks and I followed the example and rose, exchanging startled glances. But it was Cornet Spencer, his slim figure very erect and military. Behind him walked a remarkably handsome chap, a stranger, and yet reminding me vividly of some one I had met.

"Poor looking material," grumbled the stranger, eyeing us with scant favor. "Get them into shape, into uniforms, and see if they won't look more fit."

"We will begin at once, Captain Betworth," said Cornet Spencer. I stared with new interest. Now I knew it was Audrey Betworth he so strongly resembled. There was the same arrogance of mien, the same impatience at anything which crossed his will.

"Sergeant, march the men down to the battery dock and back."

"Fall in! Fall in!" hoarsely bawled the sergeant.

"Thought we was to have elegant hosses," complained a recruit.

"Hitch that man up and give him thirty-nine lashes if he speaks of horses again," snapped Captain Betworth.

We formed in two lines, Bucks walking beside me, and with half a dozen soldiers carrying bayonets on their guns we took to the street and started toward what had been Waterbury Battery when we Americans held the city. Had the day been older and could night have come when we were close to Bowery Lane I would have given five years of my life. Yet I breathed more freely as we clumped down the middle of the street.

The danger of being caught back of the tavern was passed for the time, although swift riding dragoons would soon overtake us once Mother Baff led them to Golden Hill and found her prey gone. The snail's pace we were forced to take because of the equipages, the horsemen and the endless procession of carts loaded with army stores, was torture. We were continually scrambling to one side to escape being run down by the mounted troops.

Then there was the tedium and horror of waiting in the hot sun while a congestion of supplies being hauled up from the water front was cleared. Our sergeant disappeared and reeked of rum when he returned. The soldiers—rather, our guards—took turns in likewise refreshing themselves at some near-by groggery, but none of the enlisted men was thus indulged. At another time, just after swinging into Queen's street, we were brought to a halt by a dense gathering of people that packed the street. Our sergeant went forward to learn the cause of the excitement before ordering our armed escort to clear us a path.

But we in the ranks also got at the truth.

"Deader'n any rebel ever killed on Long Island," I heard a citizen loudly aver.

"Throat slit something horrid!" cried a woman.

A chorus of voices smothered all intelligibility for a minute, then the penetrating falsetto of the woman pierced the babel and repeated:

"Throat slit something horrid! My man just come from there. He seen her."

"Did the cutthroats git her gold?" yelled a man in a leather apron.

"That be n't known," said the woman. "But it's likely."

"A fool to go home with a fortun' waitin' to be took."

"Laws me! An' so much good the heavenly gold pieces could 'a' done us all!"

These exclamatory fragments told us a woman had been killed and robbed. To create such a stir she must have been something of a personage. The sergeant, haughty because of his libations, seized a man by the shoulder and fiercely demanded:

"What the —— name does this mean? You're breaking the king's peace. You're blocking the road against his Majesty's soldiers. Clear a path there, or I'll send a few bayonets ahead. You, there in the apron! Explain what this all means?"

The farrier, for such I took him to be, was frightened by the uniform and obsequiously replied:

"Murder has been did, your worship. They've just found old Mother Baff with her throat cut most mortally. She's boasted as how she was going to tell General Howe where Kerry, the spy, could be found. Some say she was killed for her hidden gold, but I don't believe it. Cutthroats would 'a' waited till she'd collected the reward for the spy's takin'. No, sir, your worship; I believe the spy dogged her steps and slit her weasand so she couldn't blat on him."

"She was killed in her shanty in Canvas Town," eagerly added the woman. "My man seen the mob tearing her shanty to pieces in search for her gold. That shows she'd named the spy and got her guineas and had took it home to hide with t'other pretty yellow pieces."

"Pickle me for a pig! Done for right after she quit Golden Hill! If she hadn't been to headquarters afore she was killed that make-believe Kerry is a lucky dog. 'Tention! Forward march. Step lively, lads. A mug of ale when we reach the battery. So that old hellion loses all her guineas. Lor', the luck of some folks!"

A great peace came over me. It was a deliverance that would have escaped my wildest imagining. Bucks whispered to me:

"So that sprightly creatur's gone! Oh, ain't we shedding tears of sorrer? Seems good to see the sun shining once more. We'll sleep sound this night."

"Hush! Hush! Hang your head," I hissed; for to my consternation a danger as threatening as any Mother Baff had imposed in her lifetime was now upon us. Ambrose Kerry, alias Captain Sant, late of the American army, stood in the doorway of a fashionable store, jauntily wearing the uniform of a British captain. He would immediately recognize either Bucks or me, for he had often seen us uncouthly attired and besmeared with dirt. Bucks took one look and then ducked his head and turned it the other way. We were again at a standstill and shielded from his gaze only by the throngs passing the store and partially obscuring his view.

"If I could only git him at the business end of a Deckhard!" muttered the rifleman.

IT SEEMED as if we would never move. Sant held his place as though he were keeping an appointment. I believed he was looking for some one; then Betsy Osmond emerged from the store and stood beside him. It was she he was waiting for. They left the doorway and walked to the edge of the road to escape being buffeted by the drifting groups, and had it not been for their interest in each other my friend and I surely would have been discovered. They talked earnestly; then she took his arm and they walked down town, toward Hanover Square.

Even now the drama was not played out, for as we were given the word to march the figure of Paul Bowen suddenly appeared among the gossiping citizens and hurried after Sant and the maid. There was no suggestion of idling in his gait, no evidence of the common curiosity over the murder. He walked as one having a definite purpose and his gaze ever ranged ahead as if seeking some one. Somehow I could not rid myself of the notion that his presence there at that hour was not the work of chance, and that he believed his errand to be vital. Without further delay we swung through an empty street to where the old American battery—called by us Waterbury's—was manned by the British.

We were halted some distance from the battery and allowed to take our ease while the sergeant hastened to a dram shop west of the battery and back of some redoubts thrown up by our army the year before. The sergeant's thirst required some time to assuage, but the trip vastly improved and humanized him. When he returned he was jovial and permitted the guards to follow his example, two at a time.

"We're near Bowery Lane," I murmured to Bucks. "If we could make it I'd never wait till night. Mother Baff is gone, but Sant remains. One glance and our dish is spoiled."

He yawned and stretched himself and lazily wandered over to where the sergeant was taking his ease. The sergeant mechanically rubbed his eyes but did not resent Bucks good-natured grin. Bucks said:

"I've been thinking. I've got a guinea that's keen to change itself into beer 'n' a dash of rum. I'm thinking it would be a rare treat to my friend if he could wet his whistle with a tickler of brandy. You're certainly a fine upstanding figger of a man, sergeant, if you'll let me be so bold as to say it. Now one guinea ain't no good without a mate. That guinea would feel more to home if he knew his mate was crossing one end of the bar while he was crossing t'other."

The sergeant frowned heavily, then popped his watery eyes wide open in understanding and licked his thick lips. Bucks gravely continued:

"It ain't no use for us to feel mad ag'in anything but the rebels. If you're agreeable to show us the way, one guinea will do fine for me'n my friend. Not to put too fine a point on it, t'other guinea is for you, for a sergeant is the backbone of the British army."

With great alacrity the sergeant straightened and commanded the regulars to remain with the recruits until he had investigated the dram shop further. With that he curtly ordered Bucks and me to follow him. The shop was empty, and on entering the sergeant halted at the end of the bar nearest the door, and as he did so a guinea dropped between his broad red hands. Bucks and I passed to the lower end of the bar and were soon accommodated with some rum and water. We were near a window opening to the west, almost within short running distance of the Lane. The window was open at the bottom, but blocked by several barrels and kegs.

"No chance," I murmured as I sipped my drink.

The tapster had returned to the sergeant and was politely inquiring.

"What's the news in town, sir? I heard something from a teamster about a murder."

"Old Mother Baff's been turned off just as she was about to put the town major on the track of a spy."

"Mother Baff gone!"

"Killed in Canvas Town. Went to her shanty."

"She must a left a tidy pot of guineas."

"She didn't take nothing with her," grinned the sergeant.

The talk touched on Kerry the spy, then the sergeant made a bid for sympathy by telling how hard he had it with so many raw recruits.

"You'll have 'em broken in mighty quick," soothed the tapster, pushing forward the bottle.

"They'll break in or be cracked," assured the sergeant. The tapster came down and served us and then hastened back and said:

"Sergeants have all the 'portant work to do. Officers take life easy."

This met with the sergeant's hearty indorsement. He said:

"There's our new captain. Don't know how he'll take hold. One of the city loyalists. I'll have a hard time teaching him the tricks. He's Captain Betworth. Just from service in Jersey."

"Oh, ho? One of the rich Betworths! Why, sergeant, that makes it silk for you. Help him all you can and he'll pay you back ten for one."

"Don't think I'll like him. He's too stuck up. Has too many notions," replied the sergeant, now in a haughty frame of mind.

This point was delicately argued by the tapster, who displayed a rare knowledge of human nature as he maneuvered to hold his customer until the guinea was all spent. He flattered and cajoled until the sergeant shook him warmly by the hand and said they should drink together. The ceremony was fittingly concluded and the sergeant was replacing his glass when he happened to glance from the window. What he beheld brought an oath to his lips.

"What's wrong?" asked the tapster, turning back with the bottle.

The sergeant lost all his haughty bearing and looked to be badly flustered.

"Cap'n Betworth and some officers are coming," he gasped. "Sergeants mustn't drink with the men is one of his fool notions. Battery officers with him!"

The tapster was worried. He abhorred any interruption of trade.

"Down the stairs! There's a door opening out back into the bushes!"

The sergeant started for the doorway, then halted and complained:

"He'll wig me for letting new recruits come here. Won't do. Hi, you two men. Duck down them stairs and out the door and back to the others the minute you hear the officers come in. Don't let them see you. March!"

The group of officers was almost at the door when we stole down the stairs. The cellar was shallow and half filled with kegs and barrels. The ground gave way on the north side and necessitated a wall of boards. In this was the doorway. We had it open by the time the officers entered the room above. The first spoken word we heard was Captain Betworth sternly saying:

"You here, away from your men, sergeant? I'm afraid I shall have to put you back in the ranks. Begone to your men!"

"Devilish nuisance. Spoil every drinking place. Never should allow sergeants to drink anything but tea. Cursedly weird how much brandy they'll store away. Always believed they are incarnations of cargo ships."

It was Saleby speaking.

The talk became a jumble; then I was thrilled to hear Betworth explaining:

"It was a sergeant, a common sergeant, who passed himself off as Kerry. Now Kerry's usefulness at that point is spoiled. They met and the sergeant recognized him. Of course if he could be laid by the heels Kerry could go back as Captain Sant and do rare work for us."

"Blast that fellow! I always thought there was something low about him," cried Saleby. "But it's monstrous queer none of your house servants knew him for a beastly impostor."

"Ambrose Kerry has never visited us. A staunch loyalist, he knew he could do more for the king by enlisting as a rebel and keeping us supplied with information. Our house servants are all loyal. But this sergeant can't get away. Kerry is hunting him. My sister's maid can give valuable information. She's helping. What grills me worst of all is their cruelty in holding my mother and sister virtually prisoners. Took them along to Ramapo.

"Once they thought they had escaped but the carriage was bogged and they were overtaken. Kerry thought they had won clear and expected to find them in town. Otherwise he would have gone direct to headquarters and announced himself, then the inquiry as to this bogus Kerry would have been made and he would be in the New Jail by this time, or hanging in a rope."

"Well, here's death to all spies except our own," said Saleby, and it was while they were drinking the one-sided toast that we stole through the door and dodged into the bushes and began our stealthy flight to the Outward.

CHAPTER VI

FARING NORTH

WE TOOK a course about midway between the redoubts on Jones' Hill and the Lane. It began to rain when we were less than a mile from the city's outworks, and we welcomed it as it would slow down any pursuit. What was vastly more favorable to our flight was the entire lack of suspicion that the false Ambrose Kerry had joined the Rangers.

The sergeant would be slow to report us as deserters inasmuch as he would be reduced to the ranks should we be caught and tell how we went to the groggery in his company. We did not believe any inquiry would be made concerning us until the recruits had been taken back to Golden Hill. This confined our danger for the time not so much to pursuit from the city as a chance meeting with some curious patrol along Bowery Lane.

The rain continued with much rumbling of thunder. Bucks softly whistled the touching air of "Roslin Castle" until I grew ear-weary, when he shifted to "Funeral Thoughts," and attempted to imitate a drum beat at the end of each line to pound due solemnity home. I consigned him and his music to the ——.

"Rain without music is pretty dog-gone gloomy," he complained.

When the weather finally cleared the sun was half way down the western sky and our stomachs were clamoring for food. Bucks pointed to some smoke rising from the trees on our right, and said:

"Great-uncle of mine lives over there. You fetch up a bit and wait and I'll see if I can't talk the old gentleman into handing over some cold victuals."

"Great-uncle your grandmother! That's the Murray House on Inclenberg Heights. But go ahead, only be careful."

He vanished like a Mohawk seeking to surprize an outpost while I crawled under some dripping foliage to await his return. Had it been any place other than Robert Murray's, the Quaker merchant, I would have hesitated to have Bucks run the risk. But it was Mrs. Murray's shrewd hospitality of cake and rare wine that delayed General Howe and his staff the year before after they had landed at Kipp's Bay, thereby giving Scott, Wadsworth and Douglas time to fall back. That treat of Madeira saved a portion of General Washington's army from capture. No wonder the smoke was a good omen to me.

At the outset of our escape from the grogshop we had agreed that in the event we became separated we would waste no time trying to find each other, but would make every effort to carry Howe's plans to American headquarters at Ramapo. I had waited a short time only when I heard some one coming through the bushes. My first thought was that Bucks had abandoned his habitual stealth. My second thought was that it was not Bucks approaching. All doubts vanished when I heard voices. Then some one loudly cursed the wet undergrowth. I crept from my hiding place and began falling back toward the post road.

"He was going in this direction," said one of the newcomers. Then they burst through the bushes where I had been hiding, —five British soldiers. Evidently they had seen Bucks skulking near the Murray House and had given chase. He had elected to shift his course rather than to lead them to me but they had been unable to follow his trail.

I retreated rapidly to the highway, thinking to follow this north until beyond them. Their neglect to sound an alarm showed me they had not received any word of two deserters being wanted. Their investigation was of a most perfunctory sort.

I had barely turned into the highway when the thudding of hoofs sent me into the bush on the west side of the road. Three light horse troopers raced by, scanning the clumps of bushes. Then came a dozen troopers who halted on sighting the foot soldiers.

"We are after a spy. Have you seen a man dodging about?" demanded a harsh voice. I parted the bushes and looked more closely. The speaker was Colonel Wentsel. Either personal animus, or else fear of a court-martial for consorting with a spy and allowing himself to be taken in, brought the colonel to the Outward.

A soldier told about the stranger and Wentsel at once sent his troopers toward Inclenberg Heights with orders to beat up every hiding-place. One of the light horse that had galloped ahead of the troopers now rode back to learn what had happened. Wentsel ordered him to rejoin his mates and to block the highway at McGowan's Pass.

I practised all my woodcraft in fleeing westward. All my plans were changed by this unexpected peril. Instead of following the King's Bridge Road I must take to the Bloomingdale road and make a wide detour which would use up much precious time. My luck in dodging from bush clump to tree, from rock to hollow, had been good. But now I came to a stretch of open ground. I hoped I was shielded from the horsemen in the post road and started to run for it. Half way across the opening my gait was quickened by the view-halloa.

I glanced back and saw a trooper coming through the fringe of trees that bordered the lane to spur after me. I reached a thicket and dived into it and out the other side and lost the fellow. After I dropped him from sight I could hear him shouting for his companions to join him. I was badly winded when I entered the Bloomingdale road.

The fellow's discovery of me had made another nick in my plans. Instead of following the Bloomingdale road I must cross it and seek refuge in the woods above Greenwich. The farms and country seats in Bloomingdale were widely scattered. If I could reach the woods I was confident of lying safe through the night, or longer if necessary. Next to a refuge came the need of food, although my training in the American army had well fitted me for starvation rations.

At last the shouts of my pursuers ceased and I became conscious of the lapse of time since Bucks left me to visit his mythical relative. The sun was through with the day's work. Then came the smell of smoke. I was almost within running distance of the woods and it was vital that I reach cover without being observed. Yet the smoke engaged my fancy with thoughts of food to such a degree that I could not resist reconnoitering beyond a small grove of maples.

It was a smoke house on the opposite edge of the grove, presumably belonging to the farmer whose buildings showed brown in the distance. Autumn was the time for smoking hams, but the British occupation —like that of our army the year before— had sadly broken up seasonal routine. I crouched among the trees until an aged man emerged from the little house and hobbled toward a pile of green wood.

Estimating the time it would take for him to reach the pile and fill his arms with fuel I raced to the narrow door and through it. The strong reek of the smoke made my eyes water, and how the old man endured to stay in the smother, as he had while I waited, was beyond my understanding. I grabbed blindly at a row of hams and secured a lean one and thrust my head through the doorway. The old man was on one knee, his back to me, slowly filling his arms with the wood. With the ham tucked under my arm I ran for shelter and gained it just as the man rose and began turning about.

I entered the woods and the dusk became darkness, yet I managed to hold a westerly direction until I believed I was in the heart of the growth. With my clasp-knife I shaved off huge slices of the ham and satisfied my hunger. Inasmuch as the King's Bridge road was held against me, and cunning must serve for speed, I found a hollow between the roots of a tree and settled myself for the night. Despite the wet ground and my sodden clothing I slept soundly. I awoke to the singing of birds and the warmth of the sun forcing its way into the woods.

At a pool of water close by my tree I slaked the thirst created by the ham and then ate a hearty breakfast. I was greatly worried about Bucks, but knew there was scant chance of our meeting even if he were still at liberty. My plans for the day were to cross the Bloomingdale road to the east and work north between it and the post road.

This would permit me to avoid the Apthorpe, the Striker, the Hogeland and Jones estates, where laborers and servants would be abroad in considerable numbers. On the Nicholas Jones farm was a British camp. If I could traverse the island to Spuyten Duyvil creek, timing my arrival to take advantage of the night, I had no fears of failing to cross.

Packing the slender remains of the ham I commenced my journey. Now happened one of those incidents, insignificant in itself to the vanishing point, but which was to prove most momentous to my fortunes. I had gained the eastern edge of the woods when a rustic came along, an ax on his shoulder. I had ample warning and easily avoided him. After he had passed, a dog, just emerging from puppyhood, stumbled upon me in his quest for adventure.

He was a roly-poly mongrel and possessed the wide optimism of the true vagabond. He accepted me as a friend and refrained from barking and betraying my hiding place. He was overjoyed to meet me and stood with his front paws resting against my soiled knees and wagged his stubby tail tremendously. Then he smelled the ham and crowded his head against my caressing hand very ingratiatingly.

There was not much of the ham left, and I had no use for the bone, and it was refreshing to find something amiably glad to see me. I trimmed off the meat and gave him the bone. With much pretense at growling he settled down to worry it while I resumed my flight.

I was very fortunate in avoiding further meetings and finally halted to study a pretentious manor house. While thus engaged I was startled to hear an authoritative voice calling out— "Hi, my man, how long ago did you say you found the dog?"

It was a military voice that had jumped me, and I slipped behind a clump of trees.

My forced position left me but poorly concealed from any keen eyes in the manor house, but it was the best shift I could make as a lieutenant of the light infantry now emerged from cover and stood a dozen feet from me. Behind him slouched the rustic with the ax. And he was trying to explain:

"Why, sir, it was a fairish stretch. If it ha' been a old bone I'd ha' thought nothing. But a fresh, new ham bone——"

"You've said all that. How long ago? An hour? Two hours? What?"

"Mayhap a hour, but I kept no reckonin', an' it well might be two——"

The officer was much irritated and cried:

"Listen, dolt! Last night a fresh smoked ham was stolen from an out-house on the Altwood estate. Your dog is found gnawing a ham bone. Did you steal that ham?"

"—— strike me dead if I did! Why, good lack! There be hams for us all for the takin' on our own farm," protested the rustic. "The dog ran into the bushes after a squirrel, it bein' his way. He didn't foller me, an' when I went back I found him at the bone. He was that mortal sorry to leave it I fetched it along with me, him bein' too tiny to fetch it. Then I meet your honor——"

"Enough of that. We are hunting for a rebel spy. Five hundred guineas goes to the man who catches him."

"—— help us! Five hundred! I'll split him to the chin for five guineas!" exclaimed the thoroughly excited farm-hand.

"Nay! Nay! Five hundred if taken alive. Two hundred if dead. Go arouse your neighbors. If there are any dogs that can follow a scent get them. The man must be in this neighobrhood. Now step sharp."

The fellow ran like a deer toward the manor house.

THE lieutenant mumbled to himself, and I gathered that he was much exasperated. At last he turned back into the woods a short distance and began blowing a whistle. This signal meant his red coats would be overrunning the countryside shortly, and I desperately looked about for an exit from the trap. I saw the rustic run into the big barn. He was out again almost immediately with two men following at his heels, one carrying a scythe, the other a spade.

They came toward my hiding place, anxious to rejoin the lieutenant. Hearing his whistle they dashed by me. Immediately I scurried for the barn, remembering Buck's advice to hide where the enemy would be least likely to look. I glanced back toward the wood. My flight had been unobserved. I darted through the doorway and collided with old Socrates!

He reeled back against a cart and I wheeled to flee. The front door now was impossible as the rustics and the officers were standing in full view of the buildings. I resolved to block Socrates from giving the alarm, but was too late. The four men were walking toward the barn and the butler had stepped into view of them even as I dodged back.

"Into de harness-room," he directed without turning his head. Being at his mercy, I did as bid, his voice quietly calling after me—"Don' shet de door."

I crawled behind some blankets piled high on a box and found time to wonder why I had deliberately walked into the trap.

"Hi, you black man, what do you mean by dodging back and forth like that for?" called out the officer.

"I seen somethin' in de woods make de bushes teeter up'n down," excitedly answered Socrates. "Right back dere, near where yo' come from. Mebbe cow, mebbe a man."

The lieutenant approached no nearer, but exploded a few oaths and commanded: "Stop dodging in and out of that door, black man, or you'll get a bullet by mistake. You only think you see things." Then to the rustics: "Right about face! Beat up that patch of woods! He's there! Drive him out so I can get a crack at him!"

The silence was at last broken by old Socrates's throaty chuckle and his shuffling steps to the door of the harness-room. "Now yo' can come out en git to de house by de back way."

I crawled from behind the blankets and stood before him. He scrutinized me sharply and his eyes began to roll. "Fo' de good Lord sake!" he gasped. "Marse Ambrose Kerry lookin' like er stable-boy!"

"Show me a way out so I won't be seen," I demanded, reaching inside my coat for a pistol.

"Canaan's blessed land!" he muttered. "En I s'posed yo' was jest some common desartin' pusson! Young Marse Ambrose——"

"Stop it, old man!" I warned. "You know I'm not Ambrose Kerry. You're playing a game."

"Ol' Soclates suttin'ly playin' a game," he gravely admitted. "It's er game dat takes Mistah Officer Man snoopin' out in de bushes so's yo' can git to de house. Not Marse Ambrose? Lord bress yo', child, I know'd dat when you told me ol' Marse Kenton Kerry was living. En ef yo' wa'n't de real Marse Ambrose, de king's man, den I suspects yo' must be a hallelujah-rebel a-workin' fo' Marse Washin'ton. Yo' just hide dat murderin' pistol en duck out de back door en scoot fo' de back of de house. House empty. Sent de servants to town er hour ago."

Completely ignoring my pistol he hurried from the barn.

I slipped through the rear door and would have continued my flight had there been any cover within a decent distance. But the extent of cleared ground at the rear of the barn made the risk too great. It was the manor-house, or the barn. Bending low and taking advantage of the out-buildings and huge piles of fireplace wood I reached the back of the house without any cry of discovery being given. I waited but a moment when the door opened and old Socrates was bowing me in.

I was fair spent with nervous tension and the exertions of the last twenty-four hours. The butler's obsequious deportment irritated me. It was so astounding to hear his professed friendship for his mistress' enemies that I could scarce believe him.

"See here," I said, "you know I'm not Kerry, yet you offer to help me. Why?"

" 'Cause, sah, I take it yo' must be a spy," he complacently replied.

"And I'll kill you before I'll be given up!"

He laughed softly.

"Ef yo' means till ol' Soclates gives yo' up den yo's gwine to live to be older den de stars. Jest ca'm yo'se'f en foller me."

Once more ignoring my threatening attitude he led the way into the big hall and up two flights of stairs to a small room. This had a trap door in the ceiling and along the wall was a ladder.

"It's goin' to be warm under de roof," he regretted. "But when yo' have a bite to eat en a jug of water en a jug of rum I 'low yo' goin' to do famous."

I cautiously reconnoitered the woods through the window and saw the officer and several soldiers approaching the house. As they came openly and in no great haste I knew my presence was not suspected.

"So you'd help a spy, Socrates?" I asked, turning back to him.

His ancient face broke into new wrinkles.

" 'Cordin' to what side dey spy fo'," he answered. "Spy fo' Marse Washin'ton den I suttin'ly help."

"I'm trusting you. Go down at once. Soldiers are coming."

"Use de ladder. Pull it up after yo'."

With that he scuttled from the room and down the stairs.

I mounted to the loft, pulled up the short ladder and softly closed the trap. My quarters were narrow and uncomfortably warm. A small round window close to the roof-tree admitted enough light to dispel the shadows. The window was thick with spider-webs. I brushed these aside and looked out. The soldiers nearing the house were too close to be seen, but I had a good view of my late hiding-place in the woods. Had I remained there I surely would have been captured, as a long string of soldiers and some rustics were moving through the brush and carefully examining every covert and hollow.

The investigation of a thicket was simple and effective, the soldier or rustic plunging bayonet or scythe blade into the suspicious spot. Verily my gift of a ham bone had stirred up a hornet's nest. My refuge had a pile of blankets under the eaves for furnishings and I was not the first hunted man who had sought its sanctuary. The blankets suggested rest. With my loaded pistols beside me I fell asleep.

When I awoke the light was nearly gone, the sun being low and at the other end of the house. As I sat up my hand hit a platter of food and two jugs. There was a cold roast fowl and some bread and cheese. One jug was filled with lukewarm water, the other held rum. Finding a mug I mixed a dram and felt the better for it. There was no further doubting old Socrates's loyalty to the American cause, for he easily could have disarmed me, or betrayed me while I slept.

He had made use of a second ladder, hidden somewhere below, in gaining the loft.

Yet with my mind refreshed by sleep I found it difficult to reconcile the butler's attitude toward me with what had happened in the Betworth house when he welcomed Betsy Osmond at the back door. He had watched the stairs to see that I did not surprize her before she could change to her usual garments. In doing this service he had been doing his mistress' business. It was almost as if the old fellow hunted with the hounds and ran with the hares. This suspicion, however, did him an injustice; for he had had me at his mercy while I slept. The only line of thought through the enigma was to accept him as a true Whig, but not aggressive enough to combat the plans of Madame Betworth except when isolated from her as he was now in this empty Bloomingdale house.

The food and drink gave me an optimistic outlook on life. I went to the window but the dusk along the edge of the woods was too thick, and I could distinguish nothing. Now that I was rested and refreshed I began to find my quarters too narrow. Also I became less fearful of self. My store of information was of no value unless I could escape from the island and report to my chief at Ramapo. All the discomforts of the last forty-eight hours seemed very far away as I yearned for the outdoor air. I even grew impatient that Socrates did not come to me. I cautiously lifted the trap.

All was quiet below. Were soldiers there they would be drinking and eating and there would be much noise. I knew there were no servants in the house. The temptation to lower my ladder and reconnoiter was overpowering. Before I could carry out my impulse I heard a soft foot-fall and the murmur of voices. Lowering the trap until it was all but closed I drew a pistol and waited.

The butler was speaking and he was standing directly beneath the door; and he was saying: "He's soun' 'sleep. But dere's anodder ladder in de closet. Yo' just wait en yo' can go up."

"Hurry! Hurry!" a man's voice softly urged.

I WAS much bewildered. If the butler had planned from the first to give me up why had he not done so when soldiers were in the house? Or when I was asleep? Yet here he was bringing men to invade my retreat. The end of the ladder began lifting the trap and I drew back, squatting on my heels with both weapons ready. A lusty pounding on the front door caused old Socrates to exclaim: "O my Lord ——! Dey's come! Up! Up! Pull de ladder after yo'! I mustn't stay a second!"

The trap stood upright and the ladder shook as some one began ascending it. The racket below increased, and deep voices were added to the blows on the door. A form filled the opening and entered the loft. A second form, less bulky, followed. The first figure murmured:

"Look out when he wakes. He's armed."

"He's awake now," I informed. "Who the —— are you, and what do you want? My pistols are aiming at you two."

"Then don't aim them any more. We're in hiding like yourself. We've been pursued for hours."

"Then you must be Whigs," I dubiously remarked; and I gave the parole, "'To be retaken.'"

"'Manhattan,'" immediately whispered the two.

I replaced my weapons and crept to the trap. From the sound of the newcomers' voices I knew they were on the ground floor, and after ten minutes of waiting it was plain they had no suspicions of our presence, for none made any move to investigate the house. One of the strangers started to draw up the ladder, but I checked him, saying, "Keep the trap open. I'm going down. I must know what they want."

"They want us."

"We must know how long they will stay here. I intend to leave this place tonight—very soon."

I slipped down the ladder and into the hall. Several candles were burning in the hall below, and the large front room opening off of it was flooded with light. From the clatter of dishes and the clink of glasses I knew the butler was serving food and drink. Lying flat I thrust my head down to look through the balustrade. I could see into the lighted room but none of its inmates was in my line of vision. Fragments of their talk enlightened me, however.

"What will madame and her fair daughter think?"

"They'll know nothing about it so long as they are held at Ramapo."

"It's a ghastly shame. Let's rescue 'em." Captain Saleby's voice.

"Help them the most by catching these cursed spies! The island's overrun with them." Colonel Wentsel's voice.

"If we don't catch that sergeant I'll do nothing but staff duty. For if I'm captured while he lives it'll mean hanging."

The most familiar voice of all, that of my former captain, Ambrose Kerry, alias Sant.

"My men are sure at least two came this way," said Wentsel. "The camp at Jones' place has been notified. By this time a cordon of men should be stretching from the Hogeland farm to Vandewater's. Before morning it will be extended to the post road. We should make it a night hunt."

"Something weirdly unpleasant about nightwork outdoors," demurred Saleby.

"Something more unpleasant for every man who drank with that rebel sergeant and accepted him as Kerry," snarled Wentsel.

"If we only had some dogs!" lamented Saleby. "Take some of the cursedly knowing brutes and they'd go out alone and bag the game. I know a chap who had a fearfully knowing——"

I wriggled back as a figure began stealing up the stairs. I retreated to the room under the loft before I discovered it was old Socrates. I could feel him trembling violently as he seized my arm and whispered.

"Yo' all better pull er hoof en go. I'se 'fraid dey's goin' to stay all night. Marse Jasper is in his black sulks. Yo' can stay en risk it ef yo' wanter, but dey's stringin' sojers 'cross de whole island. Dey talks 'bout fetchin' up dawgs. Best time to git through is tonight. I can take yo' out de back way."

"I'll go," I readily agreed. "I'll speak to the two overhead."

"En kin'ly fetch down de platter'n jugs'n mug. Hope dere ain't no crumbs on de floor."

I ran up the ladder and thrust my head through the trap and hurriedly explained the situation and my intention of departing at once. They readily agreed it was best to leave and we cleared the loft, even to removing the second ladder. Socrates was nervously waiting for us outside the door, expecting every moment to hear his name shouted by his master.

With a deep sigh of relief he led us to the end of the hall and half way down a back flight of stairs, where we halted until he made sure none of his master's guests had wandered to the kitchen. Trembling with excitement he returned and urged us to be quiet. There was so much noise at the front of the house I had no fears that our soft movements would be heard. Socrates blew out the one candle in the kitchen as we entered it and conducted us to the back door.

"De King's Bridge is dere," he whispered, taking my hand and pointing it toward the north. My companions carried the jug of water and what was left of the fowl while I took the lead, carrying the second jug. We moved in single file and walked stealthily across some hayfields. Travel was more clumsy when we entered some pasture land, dotted with bushes and rocks. In this fashion we traveled until it was possible to discern dimly our surroundings.

Further advance was hazardous and I considered it most fortunate to discover a small shack surrounded by a rank growth of alders. I knew we were close to the post road, and very near to a line running due east from the Nicholas Jones farm.

"Shall we stop here, or go on?" I asked my companions. "We ought to get beyond the cordon of soldiers now, but every moment makes travel more dangerous. I'd prefer going ahead and eating after we've gotten beyond the redcoats."

"We must eat. My friend is very tired. To pass beyond the soldiers and then rest would be more dangerous, as they will sweep north with daylight. We're more secure hiding behind them."

They had come to me in the darkness and we had traveled in darkness, and my impressions of them were vague. With the tension of escape from the country house removed I began to take a keen interest in them. I had supposed I was the only spy. In the garret and throughout the night there had been two voices; now the approach of morning humanized them.

"Oh, let us rest here by all means," spoke up the chap with the roast fowl.

The voice sent my hands to his shoulders to turn his face to the east, where the first gray light was beginning to reveal the skyline.

"Betsy Osmond!" I whispered.

She gave a little exclamation of alarm and fiercely demanded—

"Who are you who know me in this disguise?"

I remembered my attire, my besmeared face and rough stubble of beard.

"Old Socrates ought to have told you. Have you forgotten Sergeant Morgan?" I asked.

"The false Ambrose Kerry! And I never knew!"

"You're hunted by the British. Then you must be an American."

"As loyal to America as you are," spoke up her companion. "I didn't recognize your voice. You're dressed some different than when we crossed Staten and Long Island together."

I examined his features closely and faintly muttered—

"Paul Bowen!"

"As good an American as you are," spoke up the maid.

"Just returned from England—had papers to prove it!" I faltered.

"That is true," he quietly assured me. "At the very beginning of the war I took this way of serving my country. I went to England as a red hot Tory. I lost favor over there a bit because I gradually cooled my ardor and complained of my treatment. They were glad to have me come home, but they never doubted my loyalty. Not pleasant work, but very necessary. It was I who went through your room in the Betworth house by mistake. Mistress Osmond had left some papers in her room and did not dare to return for them, fearing you. I went for her. It was dusk and I entered your room by mistake."

IT WAS rapidly growing lighter and I carefully picked a path through the alders and led them into the shack. I asked Bowen—

"Why are you running away?"

"It was my fault," explained the maid. "I made a great mistake in burning the papers my mistress gave me to bring to the city. Captain Sant—as I always call him—gave them to her when he halted the carriage at the farmhouse. I knew there was some one in General Washington's army who was furnishing information to Madame Betworth, or her daughter, or both. But I never knew who it was until that day on the farm. I hid the papers in the house and when I saw him entering the city I got there ahead of him and burned them. I had a hard time doing it as Mother Baff recognized me in my boy's clothes as Joseph Berce's messenger. That experience made me lose my sense of judgment. Had I left the papers for Sant to carry to headquarters, or if I had delivered them myself, I could have remained and been of some use.

"But you puzzled me—I knew I had seen you some time, somewhere, that you couldn't be Ambrose Kerry. I didn't want Sant to find the papers. I didn't want you to know about them. They would have harmed us but little if they had reached Howe, but in my fright I burned them. Then Sant found me and asked for the papers. He had been to headquarters after the fight with you in the house. He knew I hadn't taken them there. I didn't know that Mother Baff had been killed when he came to me. I was fearful she would recognize me even when I was properly dressed. I lost my head.

"To gain time I told him where he would find them at the house. I searched and found Bowen. It was while talking with him that Sant came to me again. He hadn't found the papers. He was suspicious of me, and, because of me, of Bowen. He insisted I go to the house with him and produce the papers. I went. Bowen followed and entered by the back door. Sant discovered him and accused us both of being disloyal and demanded we go with him to headquarters. Bowen struck him down. I shifted to these boy's clothes and we fled."

"You two made a mess of it," I was forced to say. "You made a second great mistake in not killing Kerry—Sant. If you had left him dead in the house I would have been suspected and you two could have carried on the work."

"That's what I told her, but she wouldn't listen," Bowen moodily said. "Some sort of sentiment, I believe."

Her pale face showed some pink and she said:

"He's my dear mistress' cousin. I couldn't bring about the death of any man, let alone my mistress' kinsman."

"But he is a spy," I reminded her.

"'Was,' not 'is,'" she corrected. "So were we spies. He played the same part Mr. Bowen has. From the beginning of the war he posed as a rebel in order to secure information. He never visited New York until now. Jasper Betworth was stationed in the Jerseys to receive his reports. He would trust them to only one other besides Mr. Jasper—to Mistress Audrey."

"Why didn't General Arnold tell me you were true to the cause?"

"He doesn't know anything about my work. Only General Washington and one of his aides knew until, following orders, I revealed myself to Mr. Bowen. I was to carry his reports into our lines."

"That kettle of fish is tipped over," was Bowen's disconsolate interruption.

It was now light enough, thanks to a square hole in the east end of the shack, for me to take note of the strain the maid had been under. The pallor of her face was noticeable despite the dirt she had rubbed across her cheeks, and the dark rings around her eyes made her look all eyes.

"We'll eat," I said.

We had the earthen floor for chairs, the same for a table, and nothing on which to serve the fowl. Bowen, providentially, had brought along the mug from the loft and triumphantly produced it from a capacious pocket. From another pocket he fished out a sheet of paper which he said he could sacrifice for the fowl, and on this the maid managed to carve the meat with my clasp-knife while I mixed rum and water.

"Why didn't you inform against Sant when you saw him drop the papers into the carriage?"

"I wasn't sure. I knew something was wrong. After General Arnold left us Madame Betworth told me about him. They always trusted me as if I had been a member of the family. If I had spoken after that he would have been hung off-hand. It would have broken my ladies' hearts. I love them. I couldn't do it. They wouldn't have turned me over to the hangman even if they had discovered I was a spy. Then aside from all that I knew they expected me to deliver his papers. By failing to do so I would spoil his work."

"Too temperamental," sighed Bowen. "Women always are for this sort of work. Good agents where deception and stealth are necessary, but lack fiber when it comes to a crisis. My chance for doing big things is spoiled. I spent two years in England, building myself up. I was sending home much important news by the way of France, but my best work was to be done here in New York. Now it's all ended."

The maid was in the game without realizing the possible responsibilities it carried. She had understood the dangers she ran, and doubtless they spurred her on. I was in it because I could not well refuse Arnold's request. But Bowen was the man born for the part. His downcast mien reflected the sorrow he was feeling to think he could play the spy no longer.

"I'll scout a bit and see if there is a chance of our getting through. Night ought to find us at King's Bridge. Mistress Osmond *must* get through at all costs, and General Washington must receive our word that Howe goes to Philadelphia, sailing to the Chesapeake. That is the really important news. He will not go up the Hudson to join Burgoyne."

This announcement failed to create the effect I had looked for. The maid ate daintily and Bowen tore away savagely at the fowl, and gloomily said:

"If I don't make it you can add to your budget that Lord George St. Germaine, Secretary of State for the Colonies, has been guilty of the almost unbelievable negligence of not sending Howe any orders to cooperate with Burgoyne.* It's rich. Burgoyne has his orders to cooperate; Howe has none. Burgoyne must go to Albany. St. Germaine called at his office to sign the two sets of orders when on his way to Kent for an outing. The orders for Howe were slovenly penned and the minister directed they be fair copied. The office staff was to send them into the country after him to be signed. This was never done. The minister did not remember the matter and the packet sailed with Burgoyne's explicit orders, but carried none for Howe. Why, Howe began his Philadelphia plans back in April. Burgoyne is advancing, taking it for granted Howe will meet him. Howe doesn't like the idea of sharing honors with any one. The capture of Philadelphia will be his own personal triumph. What irony of fate if St. Germaine's excursion into Kent should lose England her colonies!"

"God give it may be so!" softly cried the girl.

TO BE CONTINUED

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*A fact.

THE SCOURGE OF 1837

by E. A. Brininstool

AMONG the diseases which came to the Indian as a result of his contact with the whites, the most destructive and appalling was the outbreak of smallpox among the Mandan, Blackfeet, Crow and Assiniboine tribes, the plague being introduced through the annual visit of the steamboat *St. Peter* of the American Fur Company, which arrived at Fort Union on June 24, 1837, with several cases of the virulent disease aboard.

The boat carried a cargo of goods intended for the Indian trade, and although the boat's officers tried to avert the calamity by the impossible expedient of keeping the savages away from the infected vessel, it was a most dismal failure, for the Indians could not be restrained. They knew, of course, that the boat carried goods intended for them, and they were deaf to all entreaty, although repeatedly warned of the consequences. At Fort Clark a Mandan chief stole a blanket from a man on the boat who was in the last stages of the loathsome disease, and returned to his village with it. Messengers were sent to the village warning the tribe, but they came flocking down to the boat and could not be kept away.

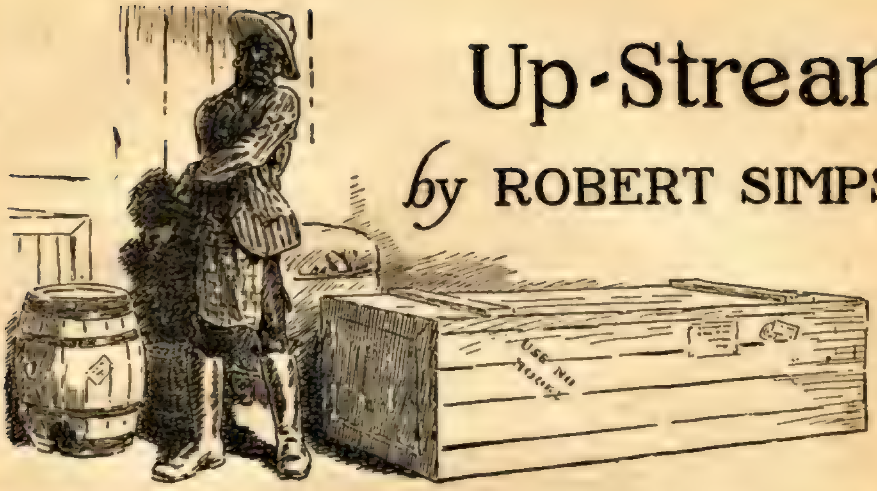
Soon the disease broke out among the Mandans and raged with a virulence never before known. Deaths were almost instantaneous; the victim being seized with terrible pains in the head and back, and a few hours later was a corpse. The body immediately turned black and swelled to three times its normal size. It is stated that nine out of every ten fell victims to its deadly grip.

The effect of this awful malady produced a profound impression upon the Indians. Some proposed the war-path and summary vengeance upon the whites. Others felt that the Great Spirit was punishing them for attempting to injure their friends. Death followed by hundreds daily, and so great was the mortality that it was impossible to bury the dead, and the bodies were thrown in heaps over a high cliff, and the terrible stench infested the air for miles around. Many of the tribe committed suicide by stabbing, shooting or drowning; and the Indians sought to avoid each other by wandering alone upon the prairie. Only about thirty persons were left alive among the Mandans, and these were mostly boys and old men. It came very near total extermination for this tribe, which suffered a heavier loss than any of the other afflicted tribes.

The pest reached the Blackfeet through an act of negligence on the part of the *St. Peter's* officials. An Indian of that tribe was permitted aboard the boat at the mouth of the Little Missouri, and then departed among his own people before it was known whether he had contracted the foul disease or not. The Blackfeet were completely humbled by the ravages of the disease among their tribe. One band, which had been on the point of making war upon the whites, looked upon the pest as the judgment from Heaven for thus attempting to go upon the war-path.

The Crows were the next to encounter the scourge, and the usual fatalities resulted, although they did not feel its heaviest effects until late in the Fall. But before the end of the year all the tribes of the Missouri Valley, above the Sioux, contracted the malady, and the extent of its ravages was appalling.

The real mortality among the various tribes has been a subject of much conjecture. It has been variously estimated at anywhere from fifteen thousand to sixty thousand, and this makes a mortality rate almost without parallel in the history of plagues. Certain it is that its toll of death among the tribes mentioned was sufficient to produce a heavy blow to the fur-traders who depended largely upon the Indians for their peltries each season in exchange for the merchandise which their boats brought from St. Louis and other distant points in the East. The wars among the tribes, and even the wars between the tribes and the whites, were nothing in comparison to the death-toll inflicted by the smallpox scourge of 1837.



Up-Stream

by ROBERT SIMPSON

THE practise of ordering one's coffin in advance is not popular even in the mangrove swamps of the Niger Delta where oblong pitch-pine boxes of prescribed length are in more hurried demand than anywhere else on earth. But Chief Oagadi of Akwanna was a man of pride beneath his wrinkled ebony skin. When he admitted calmly that he was the father of one hundred and twenty sons, and, just as calmly, refused to attempt to count his daughters or the number of his wives, he was proceeding along well-ordered lines in Jakri etiquette.

Only "small boy" Jakri chiefs were capable of numbering their wives and daughters. Oagadi's women-folk, being the property of a man of substance and patriarchal dignity, were beneath the lofty consideration of arithmetic.

On Marsden & Co.'s trading-beach at Segwanga, Oagadi was a familiar figure. In a red-and-yellow college blazer and a rather nondescript print over-cloth that was fastened at the waist and hung, like a kilt, only to the top of the knee-high rubber rain-boots he was revolutionary enough to wear, he completed the incongruous combination with a broad-brimmed, jaunty panama that boasted a band of red, white and blue.

No one imitated his style in dress. The rain-boots were too extreme, and without them a kilted over-cloth was out of the question for any man wealthy enough to afford the boots. But in the matter of coffins——

In Marsden's & Co.'s general store, which contained everything except gin and gunpowder, were two long, dust-covered cases with shipping marks upon them. These cases had been shipped by the Liverpool office to fill a requisition made by the firm's Segwanga agent. They had not arrived together. Had they done so, Oagadi's cup of bitterness would have been filled to overflowing.

As it was, he derived but scant satisfaction from the fact that the case containing *his* coffin had arrived in Segwanga first. Being in possession of the first imported coffin in Segwanga district, meant very little to him after competition had entered the field, and would mean still less if he were not the first to use it.

His rival was all the more formidable because, from Oagadi's point of view, he was of no importance. He had no kinship with Oagadi, in spite of the latter's innumerable offspring, and no respect for him whatever. In short, he was Marsden & Co.'s head shop boy, a native of Warri, who could number his wives on the fingers of one hand and have several fingers to spare.

His name was Benniba, generally shortened by his white masters to Ben or Benny, which deprived him of all claim to any distinction. There was no reason why such as he should import a coffin. His death would cause no great lamentation and would mortally affect no one but himself. He would die alone, like a bush-dog. On the other hand, it was reasonably sure, in spite of the white man's laws, as represented by Daniel Dane Parker, the district commissioner, that when Oagadi died the slaves of his hands and feet would be sacrificed to do him honor.

"Up-Stream," copyright, 1922, by Robert Simpson.

Some would be buried with him, so that he would be properly attended in the land of spirits; others would hang by their necks in the rooms of Oagadi's dwelling place, while still others, if it were not too dangerous, would protect all the paths leading thereto by staying the approach of evil with the propitiatory influence of their dangling bodies.

Later their heads would be hurled into the heart of the bush and male children would search for them, so that, in finding one, the greatness of their future would be assured.

"He is the son of a snail," Oagadi said to Anetchimi, the mother of his eldest son. "In the days of my father his children would have been accursed. They would live but to pray to the shade of a pig with a gaping throat."

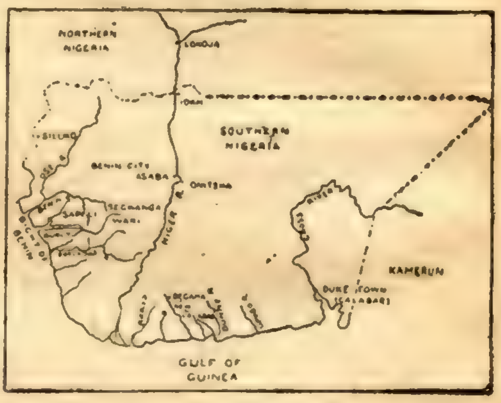
Squatting upon a mat in the middle of the dirt floor of the room, which was the innermost room of the house, and the Oagadi holy of holies in the village of Akwanna, the woman, who was wrapped from head to foot in a piece of red and black print cloth, looked blearily up into the hate-filled eyes of her lord and rocked her body slowly.

She knew that he referred to Benniba, knew exactly what he meant, and knew, too, how ardently Oagadi hated the white man's laws and punishments. When Ologbosheri, emissary of the King of Benin, the killer of the white bearers of gifts to Benin City, had been caught and hanged by the chief of the white man's government, Oagadi had returned to Akwanna and had lain flat upon the floor of that inner room, trembling as with a fever.

Only she, Anetchimi, had seen him there, and she had known it was not a fever because there was a sweat upon his forehead. Whether he had had anything to do with the massacre of the gift-bearers and their Krooboy carriers, she did not know or care. But she knew he was afraid of the white man's rope, and had seen him fingering his scraggly neck as if the noose were already there.

Shriveled as a piece of burned paper, and, to all appearances, just as ready to curl up and blow away, Anetchimi had once been young and comely, and Oagadi had paid many puncheons of oil so that she might become the mother of his first-born. Because his first-born had been a son her place in his household had been decided beyond peradventure, and her presence in that inner room was not the least of her privileges.

Many of Oagadi's children had never entered there; most of his daughters never would, not even when a wide, deep hole would be dug in the dirt floor and Oagadi, reclining in the silk-lined glory of a white man's coffin, would be lowered into it, attended by the equally lifeless bodies of such slaves as circumstances decreed it would be safe to insist should die with him.



THE room was separated from the adjoining one only by a screen of rough fiber mats that hung from the ceiling and it contained but little in the way of furnishings. Aside from several mats which strewed the floor and others of brighter hue which decorated the mud walls, a solitary Maderia chair with broad arms and a leg-rest was the only piece of furniture the place boasted. Oagadi sat in that chair in lieu of a throne and waited for Anetchimi to speak.

He knew that when she did speak her wisdom, which was always the wisdom of the tortoise, would take thought of the sons she had borne him. That was important, because just as he, Oagadi, worshiped the spirits of his fathers, so would his children worship him. And even a woman, when she is old, thinks much of the manner of the death of the father of her children, so that when evil is upon them, they may not lean upon a rotten stick or any shameful thing.

Beyond the square hole which served for a window, and which was covered by a semi-transparent mat that did not exclude all the light and air, the shrill voices of naked children and the endless chatter of women penetrated the dim religious quiet of that inner room, but did not disturb the occupants in the least.

Children were always quarreling and women of no thought were always long of tongue. It was good that Anetchimi was not like that.

"The death of a pig with a gaping throat is a good death for the son of a snail," she said at last, her wizened little body swaying gently as though the movement soothed her. "But that is a knife with two edges. He is the white man's servant and the guns upon the white man's ships kill without seeing the thing at which they shoot. It is not good to die in little pieces."

There was no humor intended. Anetchimi had never been more serious. She had specifically in mind the bombardment of Benin City by a gunboat; and the strange and devastating action of the shells had made an indelible impression upon all who had seen or heard about them.

Oagadi's mouth drooped and he fingered the amulet at his throat as if he expected it to help him. Not even Anetchimi knew what the tightly wound piece of drab-gray cloth, flanked by two large tubes of red coral, contained. But it had served Oagadi well on more than one occasion, as a leopard's tooth and the wings of a black and gold moth might be expected to do.

"The white man's guns! Always the white man's guns when the elephant would break the bush-dog's back," he declared impatiently. "And even when the father of many sons would die, then, too, must he hear of the white man's guns so that he will know that he must go into the dark alone.

"I am Oagadi, chief of Akwanna, the son of Oka, whose great, great father was brother to Asije the queen and gatherer of sticks! Am I to be mocked by every fly that feeds upon the dung-heap?"

A long pause. Anetchimi continued to rock gently to and fro and made no effort to answer immediately. Advice, if it be good, does not flow from the tongue like heated oil from the testing-pan. More than that, Anetchimi knew that Benniba was neither the son of a snail nor a fly that fed upon offal.

On the contrary, Benniba was a Jakri of Warri—which is the purest of the pure—and though only a younger son of Ilori-Atba by an inferior wife, he was nevertheless closely allied with Chief Agwala of Benin River, whose name was poison in Oagadi's ears, because Agwala was the white man's political agent among the Jakri people.

Anetchimi knew these things because she was a woman and because Benniba had as yet no sons. A man, though he have but two wives or two hundred, is without joy until he is father to a man child who will give luster to his name. Benniba's two wives had given him only daughters, a circumstance which made talk among women.

Anetchimi's lips said little, but her ears were never closed. Therefore, she knew also of Ilona, the daughter of Agwala, but she said nothing to Oagadi about that. There were sticks enough upon the fire.

"When the parrot speaks like a man, the man but laughs because he knows that the words are less than naught," she counseled pacifically at last.

"So, if the snail's son would imitate the greatness of the elephant, then must he appear as a reflection that is seen in a muddy pool, and there is none who would not laugh as they would laugh at one who has fallen to his knees when his nose was highest. It is also true that he who is worthy only of laughter, will fill the belly of his presumption upon anger."

The final subtlety was lost upon Oagadi; and most of what had gone before was more diplomatic than truthful, because none knew better than Anetchimi that Oagadi was neither wise nor great; that, in reality, he was a pig-headed man with a tremendous sense of his own importance; that he dressed as grotesquely as he did so that he would not be as other men were, and that he had managed to hate the white man in a dangerously active fashion, without facing a firing squad or straining a rope, more by good luck than good judgment.

And, obviously, he was not pleased with Anetchimi's counsel. He had hoped for a plan of action and had been given sound reasons for peace; and Oagadi, when his anger was aroused, was a man of blood first and all else afterward.

His hatred of Benniba was two-fold. He hated him for his presumption, and he hated him because the thing he had presumed to do made it imperative that he, Oagadi, die first. Normally, Oagadi *would* be the first to die, but, under ordinary circumstances, there would be no need to think about it.

In this case, however, Benniba's possession of a white man's coffin compelled Oagadi to think of death—which he hated to do—because there was always a chance that, at any hour, Benniba would be taken with a fever and die and be buried in his white man's coffin before Oagadi, even if he wanted to, would have an opportunity to forestall him. Young men do die in notorious haste and volume in the Niger country.

To relieve himself of such disagreeable competition, but one solution presented itself. Benniba would have to be removed. Because there were several ways in which such removal could be accomplished without necessitating any sort of burial, Oagadi had looked for a suggestion from Anetchimi without having any thought of making her a party to the deed.

"It is better to have a knife with two edges than one that is blunt and broken," he said sulkily and with a gesture that indicated impatient dismissal. "And even a child has heard that he who is too careful of his life is always killed by the fall of a dry leaf."

Anetchimi rose from her mat nodding her head many times. But when she made her customary, stiff-kneed obeisance, which is the due of the head of the family, and moved to pass beyond the screen of mats that hung from the ceiling, she muttered ominously:

"Hate and pride and the love of women—there is no wisdom in any of these. But if the snail's son must die, let many weights be put upon the body else it will float as the body of man never floated before."

"Like that of a woman?" Oagadi questioned, and grinned at his own wit.

"No. Up-stream," came the unexpected answer as Anetchimi passed from the room, leaving Oagadi to think what pleased him best.

His expression in the succeeding few minutes indicated that he did not like the sinister prediction, but he made no effort to ask for further information. A woman's tongue was like a ground-nut in an empty calabash.

It could make much noise when disturbed. More than that, Oagadi had too often taken his own course in defiance of the white man's laws to be frightened by the prophecies of a woman whose heart was as thin milk.

Had he not been the eyes and the ears of a king when Ologbosheri, the commander of the king's forces, had ambushed and butchered the white bearers of gifts and so many of their Kroo-boy carriers that they were heaped like the kernels in the white traders' stores?

And yet he had lived to see Ologbosheri hanged, just as, upon other occasions, he had seen others, even less guilty than he, trip and fall into the white man's noose. Always he, Oagadi the Wise, had escaped. He always would.

Convinced of that, he finally spat upon Anetchimi's fear of the white man's guns, and in the succeeding hours and days and weeks, brooded and planned and perfected his arrangements.

II

IN A brilliant yellow cloth that fastened under the armpits by a simple twist-knot and clung intimately to her sinuous young body all the way down to her naked ankles, Ilona, the daughter of Agwala, sat in the shade of Marsden's & Co.'s kernel-store awning, and held desultory conversation with the white kernel clerk while she waited for six P.M.

Then one of the Kroo-boys would strike four bells upon the old ship's bell that hung in the oil yard, work upon Marsden & Co.'s trading beach would cease for the day, and Benniba, the shop boy, would emerge from the shop. Ilona and he would get into their canoe and paddle slowly homeward, talking of the future in monotones, as a man and his wife will when they have been married but a week or two.

Ilona's head was bound about with a silk handkerchief of bright and passionate red, and even in her most indolent moments she radiated action of a dynamic order. When she moved one thought of a puma and felt that the comparison was poverty-stricken. The white kernel clerk, who was young enough to believe he understood women, liked to have Ilona "hanging around," in spite of the fact that Daniel Dane Parker, the district commissioner, had been known to say of her that she would probably do much harm before she died. And Daniel D. P.—sometimes known as the Great Dane—was a man of discernment who rarely made mistakes in a matter of that kind.

Ilona's gifts, even though she was yet very young, were obviously of the sort to upset thrones, and when she became the third wife of Benniba, the shop boy, the district commissioner said fervently,

"May the Lord have mercy on his soul. She'll make a howling success of him whether he likes it or not."

Ilona had married Benniba for several

sufficient reasons, not the least of which being that he had paid to Agwala, her father, the marriage price, and had been found acceptable in her father's sight. That necessary preliminary accounted for, Ilona had been agreeable to the bargain because Benniba, though only a younger son and a shop-boy, happened to be the man she wanted.

He had proved to her complete satisfaction that she was very desirable to him, not only because he had worked hard and long to pay Agwala's price, but also because, to impress her, he had already provided the manner of his burial, so that the sons she would bear him would know that their father had been worthy.

Therefore, Ilona knew that Benniba would not always be a shop-boy. He had the seed of greatness in him and she would be his left hand. Life was good to a woman who had honor in her husband's house.

Benniba had given the pride of Oagadi no thought when he had imitated him in the matter of the imported coffin. Ilona knew that, but she also knew that the chief of Akwanna had a worm in his heart because of it. Like Anetchimi, it was the privilege of Ilona to hear much and to see, with her young, sharp eyes, even more. In addition to which she was the daughter of Agwala, whom Oagadi hated.

For days past, since her marriage to Benniba, one or more of Oagadi's sons had been present on Marsden & Co.'s beach and Ilona had seen them there. Sometimes they came with oil, sometimes with kernels, but always they stayed till the beach was closed for the night.

Because they were Oagadi's sons, they did not speak to Ilona, and, because of the antagonism between their families, the girl was more acutely aware of their presence than she otherwise would have been.

They were not always the same men, but Ogulo, the dwarf, came more often than any. He was a squat, ape-like man, whose arms were long and powerful and said to be capable of breaking the ribs of two men at once. In a way he was a monstrosity, and it was whispered that his mother had died at sight of him when he was born. But Ilona, knowing Oagadi well, had her own opinion about that.

She had watched Oagadi's sons, and Ogulo in particular, out of the corners of her eyes, and though she knew that they would not attack Benniba openly, she was quite sure that they would not hesitate to do so if a favorable opportunity presented itself.

And upon that afternoon, Oagadi himself had appeared upon Marsden & Co.'s beach. He had not come upon an official visit evidently, as his canoe was only of eight paddles instead of forty. He had spent most of the afternoon on the house veranda with Hogmanay Sandy MacGregor, who was Marsden & Co.'s agent—or "cap'n"—in Segwanga, drinking straight Scotch and making terms for near-future trade, and had descended from the living quarters shortly after five o'clock, waving his broad-brimmed panama to the solemnly hilarious Scot, and threatening at every step to trip over the extra large knee-high rain-boots he wore.

In other words, Oagadi was enjoying a perfectly dignified state of intoxication, and when he reached his canoe which lay alongside the breakwater, he had to be helped into it or he would have fallen into the mud and slime that exposed itself at low tide. Lying at full length upon the mat-covered deck "amidships," Oagadi went off to sleep as the paddle boys guided the canoe out of Marsden's little side creek into the main stream, and headed for home.

But Ogulo and several other members of the chief's numerous family remained. They had arrived in the morning in a trade canoe containing two puncheons of oil, which they had delivered to the beach clerk and for which they had taken pay in the shop later in the day. They were still counting and arguing over the cloth and salt and gin and tobacco when one of Marsden & Co.'s Kroo house-boys rang four bells.

Then Ogulo seemed to decide that they had argued enough and ordered the stuff placed in the big canoe. This was done, and in a few minutes—by the time Benniba had come out of the shop and joined Ilona under the kernel store awning—they were almost ready to depart; it being obvious to every one who cared to come to any conclusion about the matter, that their destination was the nearest native market.

Ilona rose and picked up the inevitable squash-shaped calabash that accompanies the majority of Jakri housewives on their travels, and greeted Benniba with the customary indifference of a people whose bodies are well-nigh naked, but whose emotions are clothed in many layers of unexpected deceits.

Benniba was equally indifferent. In a

plain straw hat, and even plainer blue coat and a conservative over-cloth of good Madras, he was a clean-cut business-like young man with the light of ambition in his eye. As they made their way to their canoe, which Benniba had to push out of the mud, Ilona said in a casual undertone:

"Ogulo's arms are itching. They have not killed a man in many moons, and in Atba Creek, beyond the ju-ju beach, it is dark as the death of a thieving slave."

Benniba turned his head. He was not at all excited or suprized. He could not afford to be, with Ilona looking on. Was he not to be the father of her children? When he glanced in the direction of Ogulo's canoe, his expression denoted, if anything, a trace of boredom.

"Dark for short arms, dark for long," he said simply, and applied himself to the business of releasing the canoe from the mud.

Ilona helped him, lending the strength of her supple young body while her heart sang with the primitive joy of knowing that Benniba was, in truth, a man. And presently, as the slender craft was sliding into deep water, she leaped upon the fan-like stern of it and for a moment or two remained crouching on her knees like any jungle cat making ready to spring. But when Benniba clambered into the canoe forward Ilona went docilely to her place in the seat behind him and picked up a paddle.

AS IF the first sweeping movement of her arms was a signal that the day should end and the night begin, the sun dropped deep and like a plummet beyond the mangrove-bound horizon and, in a minute more, feeble hurricane lamps on beach and river stabbed at the black African darkness with pin-points of light.

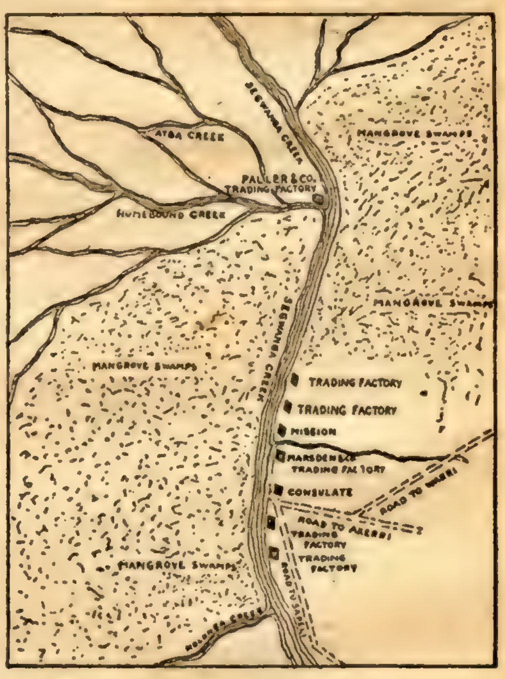
"One machete between two makes Ogulo's arms the stronger," Ilona declared in a monotone to the broad of Benniba's back, feeling of the blade of the machete she rereferred to with her naked feet, to be sure that the weapon was in its accustomed place; the machete, like the calabash and the chop-pot, being a necessary adjunct to every well-ordered Jakri existence. "And Ogulo follows us."

"Ogulo will think he is a man if Ilona turns her head to look at him to see whether he goes up or down," Benniba reproved quietly, staring straight ahead.

"I did not look. But I hear. The paddles of Oagadi's sons make a sound like the iron tail on the white man's ships. And their canoe is heavy. Also they think our eyes are blind and our ears choked with kernel dust, and they forget that I am the daughter of Agwala.

"I have watched and I have seen and I have waited, and today Oagadi drank with the white cap'n and went away, making all men believe there were devils in his belly and his feet. But his feet and belly lied, just as his tongue will lie after he has struck.

"When all men know that on a certain day Oagadi was so filled with the white man's gin that small boys laughed at him without fear, who will believe that he fed our bodies to the crabs? Our canoe is light; that of Ogulo is heavy. If we are swift——"



She left Benniba to infer the rest of it, and he was not slow to appreciate her cleverness in seeing through Oagadi's plan of action and carefully prepared alibi; an alibi that would be supported, if necessary, by the testimony of the white men on Marsden & Co.'s beach. Neither was Benniba loath to take Ilona's advice in the matter of more speed, though he did not quicken his paddle-stroke too perceptibly lest Ogulo discover the fact too quickly.

When they had traveled down the broad

Segwanga Creek, and had crossed it to enter the much narrower side creek which, with many twistings and turnings, led to the village of Atba, where Benniba lived, their opportunity to place as much distance between themselves and the ape-like dwarf came in real earnest, because the moment they made the turn they were out of Ogulo's range of vision.

Instantly, with a low Jakri guttural, Benniba set a pace that made Ilona grin with exultation because her strength was strained to the utmost to keep up with it.

Atba Creek was black as crape. The overhanging bush upon either side provided excellent cover for an ambush every inch of the way, and they both knew enough of native tactics to know that, if a trap awaited them, Ogulo and his brothers represented simply the door that would close upon them from behind when they entered it.

Somewhere ahead, if Ilona was right, Oagadi, showing no sign of his late afternoon drunkenness, waited with others of his breed in careful or casual concealment, and the more casual it seemed, the more deadly it was sure to be.

Benniba had removed his coat and Ilona could see his broad, powerfully muscled back, naked to the waist, glisten dully with the sweat of effort as her eyes began to pierce the dark more easily. Her own bright-yellow overcloth had slipped from its loose twist-knot fastening and fallen away from her almost completely, denuding her of all but a short knee-length waist-cloth.

As her slender, round arms lifted the single-bladed paddle and swept it down again in a perfect arc, the astonishment of the onlooker would not have been caused so much by the grace and beauty of the movement as by the fierce and savage power that was behind it.

If Ogulo followed, he did so hopelessly. His heavy trade canoe was no match for Benniba's light-traveling shell in a test of speed, and it had not, quite obviously, been intended to be. Unless, finding himself outwitted by Ilona's shrewdness and intuition, he had transferred himself to a lighter canoe —which was always a possibility—it was reasonably sure that he could be counted out of such developments as might transpire.

When they had passed the deserted "juju beach" of a defunct native trader, and were heading into the Stygian darkness of a sharp curve that gave no hint of what might lie beyond it, they knew that there, or nowhere, their real danger lay. Yet they did not slacken speed in the least; simply held to the middle of the creek and swept around the bend without looking to right or left, in the hope that, if Oagadi awaited them beyond the curve, the surprize would be his rather than theirs.

It was theirs.

They did sweep round the bend at top speed, peering into the dark till their sweat-blurred eyes smarted with the strain of it. And nothing happened. There was no sign of Oagadi's canoe with its little deck and its awning of rough native mats; nor of any other canoe, for that matter. Not for a little while.

Then, just as Benniba had slackened pace a little, a fair-sized canoe of about eight paddles loomed leisurely out of the blackness ahead. It had no awning, and apparently was in no hurry to reach whatever destination it had in mind. The only suspicious circumstance about it was that, instead of hugging the bush as ambling canoes usually do, it was out in midstream, and when Benniba veered off to give it as wide a margin as possible, it swerved perceptibly; then, in reply to a low, sharp order from some one in command, it shot forward with such speed and suddenness that only the greatest dexterity on Benniba's part avoided his much lighter canoe being rammed amidship.

To avert that calamity, Benniba did not trust to speed. With a sharp twist of his paddle, he pulled the canoe's nose round to meet the rush of the heavier craft, so that the effect of the collision was simply a scraping, bumping sideswipe, which had two immediate results that precipitated chaos.

It brought Benniba's canoe alongside the other and revealed to Ilona's eyes in a hazy, but none the less decisive fashion, the identity of Oagadi, who had apparently stripped his canoe of its awning in an effort to disguise it.

At once some of Oagadi's boys gripped the gunwale of Benniba's canoe to prevent it from sheering off, and in a moment more paddles would give way to machetes in their hands. Benniba knew that, and with a shouted order, which Ilona could not fail to hear, he plunged into the water, expecting her to follow.

But Ilona had work to do, and the machete that had been under her feet played a noble part in it. Only the lurching, bobbing movement of the canoes spoiled the girl's aim and intention, because the tigerish speed and ferocity of the blow she struck at Oagadi's head took him so completely by surprize that he really had no chance to avoid it.

However, though she missed his head, the blade bit savagely into his scrawny shoulder, and his scream of rage and pain, rising out of that pit of murderous darkness like a cry from out of the mouth of the pit itself, told her that the blow was good. Ilona did not strike a second time. She was but one against many and, obeying Benniba's orders, she dived.

Oagadi's boys had followed Benniba's action instantly, because this was a thing that had to be finished, leaving no trace, and while Oagadi himself urged them frothily on he prayed for the arrival of Ogulo-of-the-long-arms, and cursed the house of Agwala to its foundations till there were no more words upon his tongue; then fainted in a pool of his own blood.

Benniba's canoe, being empty, was allowed to drift, and Benniba himself, swimming under water for a while, came to the surface again within a few yards of the bobbing shell, but made no effort to take possession of it. The vague outlines of heads, principally distinguished by the sputtering breaths they drew and by the hoarse whispered orders of one to the other, were all about him; and so dark was it that, just as it was impossible for him to recognize Ilona among them, so was it impossible for his enemies to recognize him without the privilege of closer scrutiny than he permitted them.

In fact, as has happened many times in fights that are fought in the dark, numbers were a disadvantage. Oagadi's boys were confused and disorganized. They struck even at each other and did no small amount of damage in that way. Benniba, however, suffered from no such handicap.

He marked his man, slipped under water again, and attacked from behind. A powerful arm wound round his victim's throat; a swift snatch at the mouth; his victim relinquished a machete with a gurgling cry of pain; and Benniba was armed and gone again.

SWIFT, yet cautious, while confusion was heaped upon confusion, Benniba swam in search of Ilona, making the most of his opportunities the while. Once, however, when he came to the surface between two of Oagadi's boys—where only one had been before—both were so near that they recognized him instantly and struck almost simultaneously. One missed completely and plunged gurglingly under water as a result of his own wasted force. But the other——

Benniba felt a burning, searing pain on the left side of his head—felt the blade of the machete glance off his shoulder, taking a bit of the shoulder with it, then struck at his adversary with all the power that was in him. The man did not even sigh. But almost before he had disappeared from sight, Benniba also vanished.

When he came up again he felt dizzy and sick, so that nothing was very distinct, but he saw that his canoe had drifted into the creek side and that there were several of Oagadi's boys between, and no sign of Ilona anywhere.

He was on the point of diving again when one of Oagadi's boys uttered a curious startled whine and plunged sidewise as if to avoid a blow from behind. Those nearest him immediately broke and scattered in momentary panic, and in that instant, with a hoarse shout which he intended Ilona to hear, Benniba struck out for the canoe.

A shrill female cry answered him—a fearsome sound filled with awful triumph—and in the succeeding second there came another scream of mortal agony as yet one more of Oagadi's sons threw his arms high above his head and drank long and deep of the waters of Atba Creek.

His panic-stricken brothers called to one another for help and instructions. With the voice of Oagadi no longer heard among them, and the long arms of Ogulo, particularly effective in work of that kind, having failed to arrive according to schedule, their depleted forces were seized with a sense of disaster.

The darkness and the individual fear of being isolated made them seek to huddle together, so that when Ilona reached Benniba's side and swam a little in the rear as a good wife should, Oagadi's sons either did not clearly observe the joining of the enemy forces, or were too much exercised about their own safety to think coherently of a method of attack.

If Benniba paid any attention to Ilona she was not aware of it, and when he gripped the gunwale of the canoe and guided it cautiously down-stream under the overhanging bush, she constituted the rearguard without question. Benniba's head was reeling and the things he was compelled to do he did simply in a mechanical fashion. With the assistance of the bush he climbed into the canoe and, finding his seat and his paddle, moved his arms just as he had done all the years of his life.

A sudden shout from Oagadi's boys, who woke up too late to see their quarry escaping them, put more life into his arms for a minute or two. Then the sound died away into nothingness as the red fires that stung his eyes went out, and he slid forward upon his face, while the paddle slipped from his listless hands and floated off into the dark.

Ilona hung on astern. She was in no danger from immediate pursuit, because Oagadi's sons, realizing the futility of trying to swim in competition with Benniba's canoe, had begun arguing among themselves, blaming each other, and swimming back to their own canoe in the slender hope of overtaking Benniba in that way. They did not see Benniba collapse, and when Ilona became aware that the canoe was only drifting, and had called hoarsely to Benniba and had received no answer, she climbed on board as he had done, and took what remained of the situation entirely into her own hands.

And there the Atba Creek affair virtually ended. There was no pursuit nor any thought of any when Oagadi's sons found their chief sprawled out upon the little matted deck of his canoe. The obvious thing to do then was to get him back to Akwanna as quickly as possible, and even the arrival at that juncture of Ogulo and his brothers, who were perspiring profusely, did not alter matters.

No one knew that better than the long-armed dwarf. Excuses would be worse than useless. Oagadi had planned and Ogulo had failed, and there was but one answer to that. Yet, Ogulo had no thought of dying. He loved life and the taking of life too well for that.

So, at a convenient point on the way back to Akwanna, he did an awful thing. He silently renounced Oagadi, his father, and all his house by suddenly diving overboard and swimming—as only he could swim—into the eternal darkness of the life of one who would be accursed forever.

In the village of Akwanna that night there were wailing and tears and a great dread of tomorrow.

The village of Atba was silent. Even the sobbing fury of Ilona's anger was stifled by the gory horror of Benniba's shame.

III

IN THE Jakri country it is not good to lose an ear. Aside from all other obvious considerations, such a misfortune is likely to be mistaken for a sign that one is owned in slavery, and though there was but little chance that Benniba's plight would be misconstrued in that fashion, the fight in Atba Creek had put a hated mark upon him, for which it would be necessary to take an ample revenge.

It was not a matter with which the white man could have anything to do. Neither, in view of the compared results of the battle of Atba Creek, was it considered grounds for war-like action on the part of the families to which Benniba and Ilona belonged. They did not want it to be; Ilona particularly. If revenge were possible for the treachery of Oagadi and the ignominy that had befallen Benniba as a result of it, she wanted it to be her own.

Benniba ceased to be a shop-boy, and for a week or two Marsden & Co.'s kernel clerk missed Ilona from her accustomed place under the kernel-store awning. Then one lazy afternoon when he was watching one of his boys remove a hard, yellow-brown mass—something like mud that had caked and dried—from about the base of one of the thick, round kernel store uprights, Ilona appeared at his elbow, said "*Doh*" in greeting, Jakri fashion; then shook hands with him like a white man.

The mud-like mass around the kernel store upright was a settlement of white ants, and the post, which was of ironwood, had been pretty badly riddled by them even in the short time since the kernel clerk had made his previous customary inspection a week or ten days before. However, he found it easy to forget that in talking to Ilona who, after she had watched the Krooboy apply kerosene and tar to the damaged post, suddenly seemed to find everything the kernel clerk said funny enough to laugh at, and when she left him to go in search of the beach clerk, she declared pleasantly:

"You make poor Jakri girl forget trouble too quick. I go talk Mas' Kellyer. He all time sad."

It was several afternoons later, however, before she actually went in search of Danny Kellegher, the beach clerk, whom she found in the oil-yard, seated at his deal table-desk and looking if anything sadder than usual. Danny had not been born that way. Segwanga and a man named MacPhail had made him so; which, as Danny himself would have explained with no small emphasis, was another story.

"Wha's matter?" Ilona asked, bringing forth a "book," or check, which called for the payment of several iron chop-pots. "You wife done die?"

Danny's eyes lifted and cleared. Like everybody else, and in spite of his disgruntled attitude toward life in general, he found Ilona good to look upon.

"Hello! How's Benny?"

Ilona carelessly tightened the twist-knot fastening of her gleaming yellow over-cloth, glanced in the direction of a bush Sobo who was boiling a calabash of palm-oil to get some inadvertent rain water out of it, then lounged attractively against the table and said confidentially—

"Mebbe so Benniba go die. So I be sad, too. I be married only li'l bit."

Danny felt sorry for her at once; told her he was sure it was not as bad as she thought it was, then asked if she had discovered who it was that had made such a treacherous attack upon Benniba. Ilona shook her head dolefully.

"Them time it happen it be dark too much. We no look nothing. You pay book now?"

Danny thought he could, and glancing at a voucher the girl handed him, he called a Kroo-boy and they repaired to the general store where the cooking pots were kept. It was a large store, built of heavy corrugated iron upon a framework of steel, and the floor was of concrete—a fire-and-white-ant-proof place as far as the structure itself was concerned.

Its contents were valuable and varied, for the most part having the appearance of large unopened cases and bales, which would disgorge their riches like a cornucopia when broached.

The iron pots stood in an alley formed by two solid lines of cases, and when Danny told the Kroo-boy to get what was wanted, Ilona sidled toward two large, oblong, dust-covered cases that lay, one upon the other, at the end of the store nearest the door.

"Mas' Kellyer," she called in her softest tones, "this be him?"

Danny looked and saw that her hand rested on the topmost of the two large oblong cases.

"That's it," he agreed. "What's the matter? You think Benniba go use him plenty too quick?"

"Mebbe so," Ilona said resignedly. "I no savvy dat."

She hung lingeringly about the case which contained Benniba's coffin.

"I nebber see this coffim yet. You fit to let me see him now?"

"Now! What do you want to see it now for? If your man's goin' to die——"

Danny stopped, feeling that that was not the most tactful thing in the world to say; and Ilona reminded him of a greyhound—the sort that wins the Waterloo Cup—something with real class; a thoroughbred, that was it. You couldn't think of her as just a Jakri, somehow.

"Well, you see— Oh, all right. You generally get what you want, don't you?"

Ilona smiled.

"You my frien', Mas' Kellyer. I 'member you long time."

Danny paid no great heed to that; but, to please the girl, ordered the Kroo-boy he had brought with him to fetch several other boys so that the case in question could be lifted down and opened. While the boy was gone Ilona indicated the case beneath the one belonging to Benniba.

"This be Chief Oagadi box?"

Danny nodded.

"You look him?" Ilona asked.

Danny shook his head.

"I'm no undertaker. I don't get any pleasure out of lookin' at coffins."

Ilona did not quite grasp that and said so, adding in a gentle voice—

"You think so Oagadi coffim be better coffim?"

"I don't know. I never opened the cases to find out."

"We go look him now—you an' me?" Ilona suggested in a voice that purred. "No man know. Mebbe so Benniba coffim be better, then Benniba wife—me, Ilona—be happy too much."

Danny laughed.

"You have a queer idea of what'll make you happy," he said, then dropped into pidgin-English again. "Suppose Oagadi coffin be better coffin? Then you be sad, no be so?"

Ilona shrugged her perfect shoulders.

"Oagadi be chief. Suppose him coffim be better, be all right. Mebbe so they be all same. We go look him—you an' me?"

Danny tried to suggest that Oagadi's coffin was none of her business; that it was Oagadi's private property held in trust by Marsden & Co., subject to delivery upon demand. All of which Ilona already knew, because the facts as stated applied equally to Benniba's coffin. But that was not the point. She wanted to see whether Oagadi's coffin was a better one than Benniba's.

"Just you an' me go look him;" she persisted silkily. "All other men go 'way. Then we shut him up and no man savvy nothing. Mebbe so Ilona be poor Jakri girl, but she be big frien' foh you all time, suppose you try foh make her happy befo' Benniba go die."

The Kroo-boys came in then and Danny became authoritative. He ordered that the Benniba case be lifted down, then set two nail-pullers at work, one on each case. He did not look at Ilona when he issued these instructions, but she looked at him: and Danny Kellegher had undoubtedly made a friend for life.

When all the nails had been pulled out, and before the lids of the cases were removed, Danny ordered the Kroo-boys out of the store. That done, Ilona and he looked at Benniba's coffin, which from Danny's point of view was just a coffin, but which made Ilona gasp and mutter to herself in Jakri, and twist her hands in a strange and savage ecstasy.

Reluctantly she allowed Danny to put the coffin lid in place again, and then assisted him with the unwieldy lid of the tin-lined outer case; after which, with apparent nervousness, she approached the ordeal of finding out whether Oagadi's was the better of the two. Obviously she was going to be hurt considerably if it were.

A deep and most expressive sigh greeted the discovery that it was exactly the same—built to a pattern.

"Well, I hope you feel better," Danny remarked when he felt that he had had enough of it. "Suppose Benniba go die, everything be all right now, eh?"

Ilona was on her knees at one end of the case—the end where the head of the coffin was—and Danny was at the other end supporting the lid, and impatient to put it on again. The girl's hand fumbled at her waist-band, under cover of her overcloth, and she seemed to be so wrapped up in admiring the silken grandeur of the coffin's interior—particularly the spot where Oagadi's head would lie—that she did not answer at once.

"Eh-heh!" she sighed again, then smiled gratefully to Danny. "Poor Jakri girl happy plenty too much. You be proper white man, Mas' Kellyer."

Danny grinned.

"All right. Let's get the lid on again."

Ilona remained on her knees while the ornate coffin lid was put in place, and she examined it minutely as if to be sure that in every particular the coffins were exactly the same. Her right hand continued to fumble at her waist-band until Danny turned to where the tin-lined lid of the outer case leaned against some bales of cloth.

Then, faster than the eye could follow, her hand came from beneath her overcloth, and the crumbly, dust-like contents of a small flat tin were emptied into the case near the coffin's head.

In a moment the empty tin was returned to her waistband; in another she was helping Danny with the lid of the case, taking care that *her* end of the labor was the head end.

Then a Kroo-boy was called upon to hammer the nails in again, and when he had finished Ilona said as if she were apologizing for being so foolish:

"Me, I be wife for Benniba, an' I no like him coffim 'longside Oagadi coffim. You fit to put him 'nother place? It be Jakri fash'. Chief Oagadi like him so, too."

Danny saw no great harm in that, so he had his Kroo-boys move the cases so that they were separated by a space equal to the width of the store.

"Benniba and him son be your frien' foh that, Mas' Kellyer," Ilona said simply. "Many day pass, Benniba son be big man for Segwanga."

With which confident prediction she took up her cooking-pots and departed, satisfied that she could have conferred upon Danny Kellegher no greater gift than the friendship of Benniba's first born son, whose mother would be Ilona, the daughter of Agwala.

IV

SEVERAL weeks of life in bed will alter the whole complexion of living and of dying, too.

Oagadi, chief of Akwanna, was dying. At least he thought he was, and that very often means the same thing. That the cause of his death would be the wound in his shoulder which the daughter of Agwala had inflicted, did not disturb him now as much as one would have thought. It was not the wound that was killing him. It was the weight of many years that would not allow the trifling cut to heal.

Therefore Oagadi was achieving a proper satisfaction out of his approaching death. He was going to die as the chief of Akwanna should die, with great honor to his age, and with laughter in his throat for the white man's law.

He spent many soul-satisfying hours thinking of those white men who had died because Oagadi the Wise had been the eyes and ears of a king. And there were others, both white and black, whose blood had run in spite of the white man's guns, because Oagadi had said it must.

Such memories are good when a man is old and ready of his own accord to die. They make of his death a pleasant thing; the more so when he knows that the white man's law is not a law that allows its transgressors to die in bed. Always he, Oagadi, had escaped; always he had lived to laugh while others of lesser guilt than he had dangled at the end of the white man's rope.

Also, having marked Benniba like any slave, he was filled with a great content because Benniba would surely live many accursed years while he, Oagadi, would die with a joyful heart and be buried with great lamentation and much honor in the first coffin that had come all the way from the white man's country in the white man's ship. Therefore Benniba was as nothing, and the daughter of Agwala would be but the mother of pigs without ears.

And then there came an evening when Oagadi believed that his hours were numbered. So he spoke in whispers to Anetchimi, the mother of his eldest son, and she brought him a tin box that opened with a key—a present from Hogmanay Sandy MacGregor many moons before—and from a small sheaf of "books" or trading-factory vouchers—though he could not read a word that was written upon any of them—he carefully chose one of faded blue.

Anetchimi folded it and secreted it in a knot she made in her undercloth. Then she went out.

About an hour later—past ten P.M. to be exact—Danny Kellegher, Marsden & Co.'s beach clerk, was startled in the act of disrobing for bed by a low tap-tapping upon one of the windows of his room which looked out upon the veranda. When he spun about, buckling his belt again, he could just barely see a flat, wizened little face pressed flatter against one of the window panes.

He investigated cautiously and opened the door of the room with a jerk; and Anetchimi, holding a faded blue voucher out to him, said "*Doh*" in a sparrow-like fashion and left him to do the rest.

"What the ——" Danny began, then glanced at the voucher and stopped.

After a while he asked:

"Wha's matter? Oagadi done die?"

But Anetchimi only shrugged her shrunken little shoulders and said noncommittally, "I wantum box."

"So I see. But you might be civil about it when you make me work at this time of night."

Anetchimi had not the faintest idea what he meant, so she repeated mechanically—

"I wantum box."

After which, because there was nothing else for it, and because it was perfectly understandable why any one—and particularly a Jakri—would come for a thing like a coffin in secret and silence and at dead of night, Danny simply grumbled enough to let Anetchimi know that he was doing her a great favor, and secured the store keys, which were locked up in the agent's safe every night, and proceeded down-stairs.

Apparently Anetchimi had brought enough boys with her to carry the case out of the store to the large trade canoe that lay like a shadow alongside the breakwater, so that there was no need for Danny to rout out his Kroo-boys. And when he got the store opened there was no time wasted. With commendable speed and almost without a word the case containing Oagadi's coffin was transferred from the store to the waiting canoe, and only a feeble hurricane lantern in the hand of one of the beach watch-boys was permitted to shed any light upon the proceedings.

Anetchimi said nothing that Danny could understand, and the boys who accompanied her might have been dumb for all he knew. The principal desire of all hands seemed to be to get the thing done and be off as quickly and silently as possible, and altogether it was a mysterious, whispery business. Danny felt much more comfortable when the canoe had moved away from the breakwater and had passed out into Segwanga creek.

UPON his mosquito-curtained bed—after the fashion of the white man, whom he imitated and sneered at simultaneously—Oagadi waited for Anetchimi's return. The object of her errand of silence meant much to him. It was all that was left of life; the final touch of earthly glory that linked him with the death he had hoped to die, and he wanted to look upon the splendor of it before the light that was in his eyes went out.

Then let the dark come down.

And presently Anetchimi returned, and with her came the bearers of the large oblong case they had taken from Marsden & Co.'s store. They brought it directly into Oagadi's room and placed it beside the bed, not even waiting to dust it off before they did so. Then they went out; all but one who was Anetchimi's eldest son—Oagadi's first born—the chief priest, as it were, of Akwanna.

When the mosquito curtains about the bed had been thrown back Oagadi in his excitement raised himself upon one elbow and greedily watched his son pry up the lid of the dusty outer case with a machete blade. Held in Anetchimi's hand, a small oil lamp, with a glass reservoir and a smoky flame, fitfully illumined the scene, and its light being concentrated upon the work in hand, most of the rest of the room was thrown into black and forbidding shadow.

Finally the lid of the case was loosened evenly all around so that with a slight jerk it could be lifted intact and replaced if necessary. Oagadi leaned forward as his son wrenched the cumbersome lid upward, and then, for a second perhaps, Anetchimi's heart ceased to function. The lamp slipped from her momentarily palsied hand, but Oagadi's throaty cry of fear and horror drowned the sound the lamp made as it thudded dully upon the coffin lid.

Its light sputtered out, and for several minutes within that room there was the darkness of the pit and the silence that surrounds the dead.

Then Oagadi's son, muttering fearfully to himself, found another lamp, and it told him three things, one by one, each leading to the other.

Anetchimi, his mother, was cowering in a far corner with her face covered up as if from a great shame.

Oagadi hung out of bed, head down, and he was no longer the chief of Akwanna. For he was dead.

And the box of burial that had come all the way from the white man's country——

Perhaps the shades of those whose blood cried out of the earth for vengeance upon Oagadi were satisfied. Yet even they may have felt that the justice that had allowed him to go to the very edge of the grave unpunished had stricken him in his final pompous conceit more terribly than the most vengeful among them could have hoped for.

Because all about the head of the coffin and streaked along the lid from end to end were heavy mound-like trails of yellow-brown—something like mud that has dried and caked—and within those trails there was seething, burrowing life, voraciously reducing the grandeur of Oagadi's funeral bed to crumbling ruin.

One of the yellow-brown trails had been broken by the fall of Anetchimi's lamp, and the spilling kerosene was taking its toll of some of the white ants that had been disturbed in their labors. But they had already done their work quite well—even better than had been expected.

V

THERE is none of the children of Oagadi who will tell how Oagadi died. His name is but a whisper among them.

But in the village of Atba there is a small pot-bellied boy, who as yet wears no clothes at all, who will tell you in confidence that Oagadi is a name that it is not good to speak. The tongue withers and becomes dumb if you say it three times.

On the other hand, he will tell you that there are but two things living that are greater than Ilona, his mother, the daughter of Agwala.

One of them is Benniba, his father, who has but one ear.

The other is "Mas' Kellyer."

"I'VE BEEN DREAMIN'"

by Bill Adams

I'VE been dreamin',
Of a randy, dandy clippper with her tops'ls set,
Pitchin' heavy down the westing with the leeches wet.
Billy Newland, the old skipper, from his high bridge head,
Shoutin' to us packet rats—an' these the words he said:
"Hop along, now! Loose them 'gallants! Skip aloft, now! Jump along!"

Oh, them packet rats were swearin' an' a-breakin' into song!
Packet rats a-roarin', "Ranzo," rats a-singin', "Roll an' Go,"
Haulin' on them 'gallant braces, cryin', "Blow, boys, blow!"

Let her blow for Frisco city!
Let the dandy clipper race!
For them swingin' feet an' pretty
Of the gals at Tony's place.

Soon we'll see old Tony smilin',
Hear his gals begin to sing,
Hear old Billy Dick beguilin'
Music from a fiddle-string!

Oh, there's drowned an' perished clippers
An' there's rats that died—
But there's gals wi' flowered slippers
An' their skirts flung wide!

Did you say there ain't no clippers? Did you say them days is done?
Days of packet rats an' packets, an' stars an' moon an' sun?
O' lights upon the water, a-shinin' on the sea?
My God, but *I'm* a packet rat!
What will become of me?

I've got to see tall clippers, I've got to sing an' shout
When the 'gallants are mastheaded and the jibs are runnin' out.
I've got to roar of "Ranzo," an' "Blow, my bullies, blow!"
When the ice-cakes heap a-cracklin', an' the Horn is lost in snow.
I wants them lights by Frisco, an' lights by Salem too,
And dandy skippers swearin' at the signin' of the crew.
Red Jacket's gone? And *Dancin' Wave? Guidin' Star* as well?
Then what of *Golden Era?*. . . God help me! This is hell!

Good-by, farewell, kedge anchor! The shoals lie deep about;
The packet rats are singin', an' their chorus dyin' out.
The clippers lie a-westin' where the westin' sun burns red,
An' the packet rats are restin' in the havens of the dead.

Good-by to Dame Romancing an' her dainty feathered frock!
Good-by to all the laughter at the swingin' of the lock!
Good-by to capstan payments, good-by to ships at sea—
If the packets rest a-westin'—ah—westin's right for me!

"I've Been Dreamin'," copyright 1922, by B. M. Adams.

The Best Bet

by

HARRISON R. HOWARD

Author of "The Red Fire," "The Old Order," etc.

WHEN the district man and his assistant unexpectedly put in their appearance at Whiptown, in the heart of the Pacific Northwest, and took over the duties of Ranger Bradley of the old Forest Service, gossip began to smack its ready lips upon the hint of scandal, deliciously savored with mystery. Ranger Bradley had always received the respect due a solid citizen and an effective service man, and much speculative conjecture was rife as to the cause of his displacement. The ranger was silent, his attitude forbade direct inquiry, and the community was never to know that he had lately dispatched to headquarters a brief though emphatic resignation.

Ranger Bradley was known to possess an abiding weakness—the betting habit. Not that he was addicted to dice or cards or any such prosaic paraphernalia of the god of chance. His weakness laid itself upon more generous lines. He was wont to wager broadly, though without bravado, that he could negotiate some hazardous trail in a certain number of hours, or that he could have a particularly vicious fire under control in a stated length of time. And invariably he took the long chance.

That was his reputation; and one night Bob Goodwin, proprietor of Whiptown's general store, voiced a conviction long held by the community.

"Bradley, this betting habit is going to get you into trouble some day!"

The ranger grinned happily.

"Well, Bob, it's a gambling chance, and I'll bet you a pay-check you don't live to see the day."

Goodwin blinked thrice and called the bet. The occurrence was soon forgotten until one day months later, when Bradley sought out the merchant and handed him an indorsed pay-check. He refused to explain, stating merely that he had lost the bet; and although it was scarcely a week later that the district man came to take over Bradley's duties until a new man could be appointed, no one seemed to connect the two happenings in explanation of Bradley's displacement.

From the day of the district man's arrival Bradley went no more to the little service office which was connected by telephone with a relay station that served to transmit fire reports from the lookout station high on the brow of Bald Mountain. For a month the days passed in unremarkable duplication; then fires began.

In a single week Bald Mountain reported five blazes on the reserve. Driscoll, the district man, impressed his crews and extinguished the fires. Every one of them bore marks of incendiary origin. Day after day the new reports came in over the wire and each evening came word from Baldy that a light mysterious smoke hung over Black Swamp.

"It's O'Toole or some other bug, all right," the district man told Franklin, his assistant. "Five in succession, and the chief due here in a day or two on his tour of inspection! Five fires, and we've been able to do nothing to prevent a sixth. And Baldy reports daily that somebody's trying to set off Black Swamp!"

Franklin's youthful face reflected the gravity of his superior's.

"What's the answer, boss?"

Driscoll sat in silence for a time, looking levelly at the other, his lips upturned slightly in a half-expressed smile. He said finally, emphatically—

"The answer is Bradley!"

The younger man laughed with a hint of sneer, the quick pride of the service unconsciously condemning his superior's decision.

"Bradley? Why, he's a quitter!"

Driscoll's difficult smile broadened.

"Don't be too sure."

"But if he was any good why did headquarters let him go?"

"Headquarters didn't have anything to say about it. Bradley quit because the chief wouldn't give him that big down-river post. And Bradley was in line for it."

"What did the chief have against him?"

The question seemed to annoy Driscoll. He made an impatient gesture.

"Not much; but the principle of it meant a lot to the chief. You know the chief is absolutely opposed to gambling. Well, last time he and I were here on inspection Bradley laid several bets with him, and although the old boy didn't take up the bets, ignored them in fact, yet things proved out so that Bradley's bets would have won, and the chief couldn't help noticing."

Young Franklin's eyes were wide.

"So the chief gets back at Bradley by turning him down on the promotion?"

Driscoll laughed shortly, eying his assistant sharply.

"That's funny! Do you know, that that's just the way Bradley has it figured out. And you're both all wrong. Too bad! We need Bradley now. I've always trusted him so much that I've neglected his patrol. He knows it like a book and I never figured he needed overseeing. Whatever Bradley did, I knew was done right. I never bothered; so I don't know the patrol, and with him gone I need to know it now."

Quick apprehension was visible in the assistant's eyes.

"But we can't ask help of him!"

Driscoll sat staring at the reports of the fires.

"The chief is due any time within a day or so. He won't like these reports."

He glanced defiantly at the younger man.

"I think we *can* ask help, Franklin! What the —— is a little thing like my pride at a time like this? I can pocket it! You know the dictum—it's the service that's got to be served. Go get Bradley."

Bradley came at once. He had divined that the summons was in the nature of a call for help, and he was eager to hear Driscoll voice it that he might refuse. He greeted the district man cheerfully, and, dropping into a chair, faced Driscoll across the flat top of the desk that had once been his.

The district man laid his cards frankly on the table and attempted to appeal to the pride Bradley had once had in the service.

Bradley shook his head.

"I'm out of the service, Driscoll."

"Not entirely. Your resignation hasn't been officially accepted by the chief yet."

"You haven't heard of me cashing any pay vouchers since you came, have you?"

"That's beside the problem, Bradley," the other replied, obviously laboring to control his impatience. "You're familiar with this patrol; you know every nook and corner; and I don't. You ought to give a last lift for the good of the service."

Bradley laughed mockingly.

"The good of the service? Good Lord, Driscoll, you know the deal the service handed me!"

The district man nodded sympathetically.

"Yes; you wanted that down-river post, and I indorsed your application favorably. But, Bradley, it was a lot your own fault that the chief turned it down. You know what kind of man the chief is, and you can remember what you did last time he was here. Bet, bet, bet, and you knew he's opposed to gambling among men he promotes to the big jobs in the service. Why, when he happened to mention casually his pride in being something of a revolver shot you even bet him that at fifty feet you could pick the cameo out of his stick-pin without injuring the setting!"

Bradley laughed with relish.

"And the old moralist didn't have it in him to call!"

Driscoll's impatience burst bounds.

"—— it, Bradley, let's come open or shut! Will you give us a lift?"

"Not in a million years."

The district man relaxed, leaning back in the chair. He realized that direct appeal was useless; only ruse remained. He recalled Bradley's weakness; and for a long period of silence he surveyed the ranger speculatively.

Suddenly he seemed resigned to Bradley's decision.

"Sorry, ranger, you feel that way. But thanks anyway for coming over. I'll have to blunder through it myself. It isn't the reserve fires that bother me so much; it's the mystery of why any one would want to set Black Swamp off."

Bradley stirred instantly; Driscoll saw the tightening of the muscles of his face.

"Somebody trying to set off Black Swamp?"

"Yes; hadn't you heard? I thought all the town had heard the reports; several asked me about them. Baldy has been reporting a strange smoke over the swamp every evening."

"You mean to tell me that this town has learned that the service is reporting fires in Black Swamp and that it considers the fires there fire-bug work?"

Driscoll nodded.

"No doubt it's the same fellow who's giving us the —— on the reserve."

Bradley laughed.

"You're crazy, Driscoll. Nobody would try to burn down Black Swamp. The timber there is worthless, and the fire couldn't spread to the good stuff. Have you the smoke locations there?"

Driscoll pushed a file of papers across the desk. Bradley glanced eagerly at them, then looked up, his eyes kindling.

"Mind if I get a personal paper out of the desk-drawer, Driscoll? Left it here by mistake."

Driscoll nodded, and when the ranger had the paper he opened it out, revealing a rough chart.

"Made this last year when I spent a week going all over Black Swamp. Charlie Mears bet me fifty that it couldn't be done, so I did it."

Several minutes passed while Bradley compared the reports with his big chart. When he looked up at Driscoll again his face was glowing.

"Driscoll, there's no fire in the swamp!"

The district man smiled with assumed tolerance.

"There are Baldy's reports."

He hesitated a barely perceptible moment, then said tentatively—

"And I'm betting they're right."

Bradley's body stiffened. Unconsciously he leaned farther across the table-top.

"You're not like the chief, eh? You're game to lay a little bet! Well, I call you and raise you another. The town knows about these reports—you admitted it yourself. I've been waiting for a chance like this.

"Driscoll, I'll bet you that between sunset today and sunset tomorrow I can cross Black Swamp, stop that —— -fool smoke, and when I do it will automatically stop the fires on the reserve. All that I bet you, Driscoll, and this much more: When I get back and tell the town what that smoke really was they'll laugh the service off the patrol."

Driscoll got to his feet.

"You can't cross Black Swamp at night. Why, man, by day it's ninety per cent. suicide!"

"I can't? Are you saying that or betting it?"

"Betting it—at your price!"

"Fifty!" Bradley fairly barked.

"Done! You can't cross at night."

Bradley laughed.

"I'm the man who spent a week in it—all over it. Look here. See that cross on my chart? All your smoke locations are right around it. You don't know what that cross means, but I do! There's a poor devil's bones buried not a million miles from there—I buried them!"

Concern was written upon the district man's face.

"You're mad to try it at night, Bradley. Wait till morning. The bet holds even for crossing by day."

Sneering, Bradley folded the chart and thrust it into his pocket.

"The bet stands as is, without any pikering! I'm in and out of that swamp between this minute and tomorrow night!"

He picked up his hat and turned to go. Over his shoulder he said with a laugh:

"Lucky the chief isn't here, Driscoll. He'd fire you for betting!"

A moment later the door slammed behind the ranger. Driscoll drew a handkerchief and mopped his brow. Franklin looked in through the doorway of the next room.

"Good man—Bradley!" the district man

said as his assistant took the seat the ranger had just quitted. "Too bad he's got the betting weakness. And yet—I don't know as I'd call it just that. I must have a talk with the chief when he comes."

S BRADLEY was grateful for the full moon which sat upon the horizon and threw a dull reflection upon the forbidding tangle of lush overgrowth that was Black Swamp. He left his horse in a tiny meadow beside the main trail to the reserve, and on foot struck out across country where the healthy forest, clean based and park-like, gradually gave way to rank, sodden-rooted vegetation.

When he had reached the edge of the swamp proper he delayed many minutes searching out the point where, a year before, he had begun his traverse of the treacherous land in response to another wager. That had been a trip of madness as was this, with the one difference that he had then crossed in daylight the danger belt that ringed the center of the swamp. There had been no need for hurry then; he had taken his time, pausing now and then to strike a blaze with his hatchet upon the trees along the way to guide him upon his return.

His eagerness for the present undertaking had been tempered with misgiving since he had left Whiptown behind. He was not so confident that he could cross in darkness the treacherous bad-land with its endless acres of mire, its unhealthy vegetation, and its countless traps of exposed roots upon which one might fall in the darkness and break a leg, or perhaps two. Tragedy, with a hint of mockery, would lurk in the wake of such an accident; for the citizenry of Whiptown would never think of going out in search of Bradley, who never lost such a bet.

He mildly upbraided himself for making the rash wager, for letting himself be swept by the impulses of the situation into such an unreasonable enterprise. He wondered, now that he had time for sober reflection, if Driscoll had consciously turned the situation to this end. The district man had probably been laughing behind his hand. Well, he'd laugh the other way before another sunset—providing Bradley's hunch proved up.

This thought cheered him, and he was grinning to himself when, coming abruptly upon a familiar spot, he flashed his electric torch and after a careful search found a weather-darkened blaze upon the trunk of a giant fir. He turned at once to the left and went down a narrow aisle that twisted away among stunted, unhealthy trees which were choked by rank, octopus-like undergrowth that reached up millions of strangling fingers to sap the vitality of the forest.

The way, Bradley knew, was along a low, flat ridge. To either hand, though he could not see far, the land dropped away gradually from his trail and stretched off into damp, steaming flats. There was an unnatural warmth upon the dead, still air; a heavy, fever-laden energy rose from sweating acres of decaying vegetable matter.

As he went on the trees grew sparse, less vigorous of development, though the oppressive undergrowth increased. There were spaces where no foliage was overhead to shut out the moon, and here the last year's blazes were not difficult to trace. But when he passed through dark intervals, where a fabric of leafage was woven against the sky, he had to flash his torch many times to make sure of the way.

And that he make sure of the way was imperative. He knew that were it daylight he could see to either hand foul, stagnant acres sometimes dry with a deceiving, brittle-caked surface skin which suggested safe footing, but which would give way beneath the merest pressure. It was an uncertain matter to wander from the safety of the ridge into the endless bogs beyond.

For half an hour he went steadily on, at first with comparative ease, but as time wore on with gradually increasing difficulty. His blazes of the year before had been hastily struck; many of them were faulty and deceptive; and before an hour had gone he was pausing at short intervals to check the accuracy of his course.

Yard by yard as he penetrated the wilderness his taste for the expedition and his certainty of its success decreased. Once when he brought up confused, unable to trace the trail, he was tempted to turn back. If he was to give up at all, he reasoned, the sooner done the better, for the farther he went into the increasing maze the less would be his ease in back-tracking his footsteps.

After a prolonged study of his chart and compass in the light of the electric torch he went on once more, more speculative than certain of the way. If he were anything but a fool, he told himself, he'd turn back. But he did not. Though a fool's plaything, a bet was a bet; it was his admitted weakness—a weakness possessing the strength to drive him on.

Coming suddenly upon ground which seemed to take hold and cling to his shoe-soles, Bradley halted in no small panic and flashed the torch. The floor of the earth was damp, and his footsteps had brought water to the surface. The air here was stiflingly hot; the world seemed to be sweating vilely. Beyond, in the uncertain gloom, he descried a gray, forbidding mist that hung like a shroud above the ground. He hastily retraced his steps until he reached the last blaze.

He had just replaced the compass in his pocket when, glancing up, he saw two burning points of light in the heavy foliage above. On the moment's glance they seemed to be two imminent stars. Bradley drew his revolver at once and took aim at a point between them. For an instant indecision held him; it might be nothing more than a harmless lynx or a bob-cat. But he did not like the width between the eyes, and he made a bet with himself that it was a mountain lion driven down to water by the drought in the uplands.

Bradley fired, the burning eyes went out and the beast screamed evilly the prolonged death cry of the mountain lion. There came the sound of ripping bark as the animal's claws sought to catch hold; a moment after a heavy body crashed to the ground, slapping wetly upon the mire.

Bradley waited breathlessly, revolver ready, for some further sound which would tell that the beast was still alive. Minutes passed in utter silence, and when perhaps five had gone with no such warning Bradley's derisive laughter broke the oppressive soundlessness, and, returning the revolver to its holster, he went on.

He found where he had left the trail before, and, turning sharply to the right, followed along the twisting, narrow aisle to the next mark of his previous trip. Here he halted to take his bearings once more. The air was lifeless, overburdened with humidity, unsatisfying to his lungs. He was sweating voluminously, and as he paused, studying the chart, a chill ran through him. Every pore of his body, he knew, was open and receptive, and he hurried on, realizing that safety lay in keeping his body in motion.

At places the dim way was overgrown, and he had to force passage by thrusting aside rank tendrils of undergrowth. Once he stumbled upon an exposed root that lay upon the surface, twisting like a fat black snake across his path. He fell heavily and rose winded and aching.

He was now in the very heart of the badland that ringed the center of the swamp about in a dismaying black tangle. Time and again he was halted by some dry stirring off the trail and paused, revolver in hand, prepared for any encounter. When confusion of direction again checked his progress and he drew chart and compass from his pocket he found that in his recent fall he had broken the compass.

Though perspiration streamed from his forehead, rapidly recurrent chills ran their course upon him. He knew real fear. He cursed himself roundly for the foolish venture, this pursuit of a vague hunch with nothing more in its favor than the coincidence of the location of the swamp fires and the cross on his chart.

He went doggedly on, but found no more blazes. He had wandered from his original track; he must rely now solely upon an innate sense of direction and follow his nose.

He came suddenly to where the dry ridge he had been following ended; beyond lay an expanse of soggy marsh land, glistening in the moonlight. He remembered encountering such a spot upon his previous trip; he had at that time removed his boots and crossed it barefoot to save building a fire and drying out his footgear. Now, however, it was night and he feared the risk of cutting his feet upon some sharp object. Countless infections might lurk in that poisoned, stagnant mud.

He went on in his boots. Every yard was a task in itself. The slimy earth clung to his shoes at each step; by main force he had to break the suction which held him. The sea of mud seemed endless, and his legs ached with the strain as he came once more upon solid earth.

He walked laboriously up a barely perceptible slope. Both shoes were weighted down with great clods of black, evil-smelling mud. He sat down upon a fallen trunk, fast decaying, and with a stick carefully scraped the mire from his feet. He had no definite idea where he was; morning was still some six hours away, and he must go on before the chills began once more.

As he poked the last of the mud from his heels he wondered if Driscoll, back in the warm little office cabin, were laughing at him. The district man had made a cat's-paw of him, he was certain now; he had skilfully engineered the situation which had led to the bet.

Curse that bet anyhow! But it would prove a boomerang to Driscoll if— He must go on at once!

He rose from the fallen tree, threw away the stick and was reaching for the chart when he suddenly raised his head and began to sniff the air. He sniffed explosively several times. Unmistakably it was wood-smoke!

Bradley abruptly forgot his weariness, his recurrent chills and fever, and, throwing back his head, laughed boisterously. It was that mysterious swamp-fire the service had been reporting daily. It was the thing he was after! At once faith in his hunch, in the coincidence of the smoke locations and the cross on his chart, revived.

A light breeze had sprung up, bearing the smoke taint down upon him. He made his way rapidly in the face of it, and yard by yard the odor grew more pronounced. His pulse beat high as he came suddenly upon familiar ground and, just beyond, stepped out upon a small, natural clearing. There before him stood the rude cabin which was represented by the cross upon his chart.

From the squat mud chimney of the cabin a heavy, green-wood smoke emerged and was bent by the breeze and scattered in his direction. The structure was without windows, but at the bottom of the door a narrow crack revealed a glow within. The volume of the smoke indicated to Bradley that fuel had lately been placed upon the fire, and it was likely that the quarry was within.

The clearing was flooded with pale silver from the moon, and Bradley, keeping within the fringe of shadow at the forest edge, made his way to the point where the open space between the cabin and the clearing edge was shortest. He halted there and saw, just beyond, the pine cross which marked the place where he had buried the body he had found in the cabin.

He drew his revolver and, silent as a hawk's shadow, he swiftly crossed the open space to the cabin wall. He reached the building at a point just beyond the base of the mud chimney; then, keeping within the shadow, he went cautiously toward the front. Just as he turned the corner, his heel caught in the crotch of a tree-limb lying beside a small woodpile, and, stumbling, he fell heavily against the cabin wall.

He hung in breathless silence, listening. He was certain that the quarry, was he within, had heard the sound. For several minutes Bradley waited, but no indication of movement within the structure reached him. He extricated his heel, and, rounding the corner, went directly to the door.

It was unlocked; and, kicking it open, he stepped at once into the room. The door swung shut behind him, revealing the place empty of human life. He was mildly surprized, disappointed; the quarry must have left the cabin just before he had reached the edge of the clearing. The fire was still high; the savor of food still burdened the atmosphere.

At one corner of the room hung a screen made of burlap sacks sewed together and nailed upon a light cross-stick which was suspended by a single rope from the ceiling. The burlap reached to the floor and might, Bradley considered, hide the man he had come for. At the opposite corner stood a pile of boxes which also might afford hiding-room.

It was his hunch, however, that he was alone; probably some business had taken the cabin's present owner off into the woods shortly before the ranger's arrival. He glanced at the revolver in his hand and grinned to himself.

He was about to return it to the holster when his eyes, running to the fireplace, suddenly fell upon the stub of a cigaret upon the hearth near the fire. One end of the stub was still damp; from the other end a thin thread of smoke twisted upward to join the heavy smoke of the fire.

Bradley realized that he was not alone. He swept his glance first to the pile of boxes, then to the burlap screen hung by the single rope from the ceiling. In one place or the other the man was hidden.

"Mr. Man," Bradley said aloud, grinning happily, "my bet is that you're behind that burlap."

He punctuated the sentence with a shot from his revolver. The rope holding the screen was severed, its strands suddenly released, coiling back like vipers. The burlap fell to the ground, revealing the figure of a man crouching in the corner as he jerked wildly at a revolver that clicked upon an already discharged cartridge.

The hammer of the quarry's gun was rising again as Bradley fired a second time. The man cried out with pain, and the hand bearing the weapon fell limp at his side.

"Don't monkey!" Bradley warned cheerfully. "I can pick the stone out of a cameo stick-pin at fifty feet without touching the setting—and that's a bet that's never been called. Besides, if I'm not mistaken your name is O'Toole, and the bounty posted for you reads dead or alive. It's up to you, O'Toole, how I take you in."

The ranger glanced across at the pile of boxes, then up at the stub of rope hanging from the ceiling.

"Now that's what I call a pretty good bet, O'Toole! If I had laid it on the boxes there you'd have got me."

The quarry sneered from behind a week-old stubble.

"Young fellow, I'll bet you think you're a regular slicker!"

Bradley glanced sharply at him, then grinned.

"It's dangerous business to bet. They say gambling's the source of most trouble in the world. Why, man, if it hadn't been for a bet you'd be footloose and free right now. Just take my advice, O'Toole, and never lay a bet."

THE following day, just after the noon mill whistles had shrilled, Driscoll, seated at his desk, was disturbed by a sudden clatter of hoofs upon the board sidewalk in front of the office. The door was struck a sudden blow and flung open. In the aperture appeared a horse and rider.

Ranger Bradley urged the animal into the room, bending low over the pommel to escape the top of the door-casing. Behind him, across the animal's flanks, draped like a sack of flour, was the limp figure of a man, bound hand and foot.

Bradley kicked the door shut behind him. Driscoll laid down his pencil and sat regarding the ranger.

"Hello, Bradley."

The ranger seemed not to hear. He turned upon the saddle, took the limp figure beneath the armpits and set it easily upon the floor.

"Rough trip, eh, old partner?" he said solicitously. "Have another smoke?"

The man glared sullenly from behind his stubble. As Bradley produced tobacco and papers the prisoner hobbled to a near-by chair and sat down. Bradley rolled a cigaret, thrust the end of it between the other's lips and held a match.

"Sorry to part company with you, old-timer. You're real vicious and a right exciting trail-partner. I plumb like you; but there's your new boss over there, O'Toole."

Driscoll rose and leaned across the desk.

"By George, it *is* O'Toole!"

He glanced swiftly up at the ranger, his eyes bright.

"You've got a nice little reward coming, Bradley. How'd you do it?"

Bradley grinned.

"After a bit, Driscoll, the town'll tell you—with a laugh!'

Driscoll shrugged, dropped back into his chair, and called to his assistant, who came from the room beyond. Franklin listened to his instructions in awed silence, then cut the thong at O'Toole's feet and led him away.

Bradley, hunched upon the saddle, one leg flung over the pommel, rolled and lighted a cigaret. Driscoll bit the end from a cigar.

"Well, you did it, Bradley. Now, what's the answer? You ought to give us a fair chance of protecting ourselves before you tell the secret to the town and it loses all respect for the service."

Bradley blew a thin stream of smoke from pursed lips.

"There is an old cabin in the swamp, Driscoll, that I found a year ago. At that time there was a body in it, and I buried the bones. I marked the place with a cross on my chart, and when you showed smoke locations I saw that they were all right around that spot.

"I figured it right—O'Toole set the fires on the reserve, and used the swamp for a hiding-place. Everybody in town knows that it's been reported that somebody was trying to set off the swamp; and when I explain that the smoke was out of a fat mud chimney the town's going to be tickled."

A dull glow mounting to his face, the district man nodded, smiling sadly.

"The chief will laugh, too, Bradley, but he won't be tickled. Far from it. When the people begin to laugh at the service it's pretty near the end, for we're dependent upon the respect of the community. I'm sorry, Bradley, that you've decided to tear down the respect that you've done so much to build up these last few years."

Bradley flicked the ash from his cigaret.

"You're whining now, Driscoll."

The district man half-rose to his feet, then relaxed again.

"Perhaps I am, Bradley; but don't tell me about it. The mistake was mine entirely; I've always let you run your patrol alone, and therefore I wasn't familiar with it. I simply took the opinion of the lookouts.

"But the blame won't reflect on me in the people's eyes. It's the service that's going to get ——! How long have you been in the service, Bradley?"

"Four years."

"And you're going to make it ridiculous after that length of time? Didn't you get anything out of it, any—well—any pride?"

"It didn't hesitate to make me ridiculous," Bradley returned swiftly. "Every one in Whiptown knew I was in line for that down-river job, and that I got cheated out of it."

Driscoll shrugged to indicate his acknowledgment of the charge.

"Bradley, the chief came into town yesterday evening just after you left. He's out to lunch now, and I want to get this thing settled before he comes back. You've got the reputation of being a good sport and a game loser. Man to man I ask you, for the good of the service, to let bygones be bygones."

"A good sport, eh?" Bradley echoed, leaning across the pommel, obviously relishing the situation. "Like the chief is, eh? He's such a good sport that just because I'm man enough to call a bet now and then he disqualified me for a post my record entitled me to."

The district man's temper, which through Bradley's recital he had been controlling with patent difficulty, suddenly broke bounds. He rose to his feet and, leaning across the desk, glared up at the ranger.

"You're a —— fool, and a blind one, Bradley! Can't you ever see the truth about this matter? You keep pounding away on the idea that the chief turned down your application on personal grounds. Can't you dope out the chief any better than that? Can't you realize he's too big to have such a thought? The chief is body and soul in this man's service; the only thing that influences his decisions is that the old service has got to be served."

Bradley sat staring in silent wonder at the speaker, his cigaret forgotten, drooping from the corner of his mouth. He had never before seen Driscoll so thoroughly in the grip of emotion.

"Don't you see that the chief turned down your application on principle, not because of the nasty little bets you tried to lay on him? He was considering the service! He couldn't trust a big job like the down-river post to a man who is likely any time to bet he can make the trip to Jerico and back in ten days and go off and let business go hang while he proves his bet. He figured it wouldn't be fair to the service.

"Bradley, I had a long talk with him last night and I know that your case was decided absolutely on its merits. The service stands back of its men—its good men. And it don't want the other kind—incompetents and quitters."

Driscoll's face was sprayed with light color; he was thoroughly aroused.

"A man who earns promotion gets it. Even the chief will gamble on a good man. Don't laugh, Bradley. Why, I can prove to you——"

He paused abruptly and glanced beyond Bradley. The ranger turned and saw the chief closing the door behind him. He looked up at Bradley from pale, studious eyes, and a mild, repressed smile lifted his thin lips.

"How are you, ranger?" he asked cordially; then turned to Driscoll.

"I hear you have O'Toole."

Driscoll pointed to the man on horseback.

"Ranger Bradley brought him in, sir."

The chief sat down upon the chair which O'Toole had lately occupied.

"Bradley, eh? Then what was the bet? If Ranger Bradley had anything to do with it there was a bet some place."

Bradley laughed, but with Driscoll's words still ringing in his ears his merriment lacked its usual spontaneity.

"Chief, it was a good bet, but I don't think you're sport enough to appreciate it."

Driscoll stepped hastily forward to the front of the desk.

"I'll tell the chief about it, Bradley."

He turned to the studious man, who sat loading a brier pipe.

"I told you last night, sir, of the fires on the reserve and the smoke reports on the swamp. Bradley here knows the country like a book; he even lived a week once in Black Swamp on a bet; and when I showed him the reports and told him that I suspected that O'Toole had drifted down from the upper country he was familiar enough with the peculiar conditions here to put two and two together.

"Now, chief, the point of the bet is that Bradley has discovered that the service is decadent—it's composed of pretty poor sports. To demonstrate it he bet me that no matter how big a job a man did, the service was too small and narrow to appreciate it. The service didn't stand behind its men on their merits—it was personal and mean. That's the bet, chief, and Bradley brought in O'Toole by way of proof."

It was on the tip of the ranger's tongue to call the district man a liar. That wasn't the bet at all; Driscoll was playing some sort of game. Before Bradley could voice his protest, however, the chief rose to his feet and faced him.

"Ranger, you're a regular —— hooting, betting man, ain't you!"

Bradley was startled and mildly shocked. Never before had he known the chief to be profane or slangy. He stared curiously at the mild-eyed official, who went on:

"That was a very neat little resignation you sent me, but before I accept it I'm going to call your bluff about being a gambler. I've got an idea that you're a tinhorn; and I want to lay a man-sized bet with you."

Bradley's eyes blinked rapidly. After a moment he was able to say—

"Name her, chief."

"I'll bet you, ranger, that the man who crossed Black Swamp last night and brought in a prisoner the service has wanted for months isn't capable of taking hold and making a success of that down-river post I'm offering him."

For a moment Bradley was breathless. An instant later he was on the defensive, sensing the presence of a practical joke. Then he saw Driscoll, standing beyond, smiling at him. The district man evidently read the cause of his hesitation, for he nodded to him reassuringly.

Bradley, moved by sudden impulse, swung from the saddle and stood facing his superior.

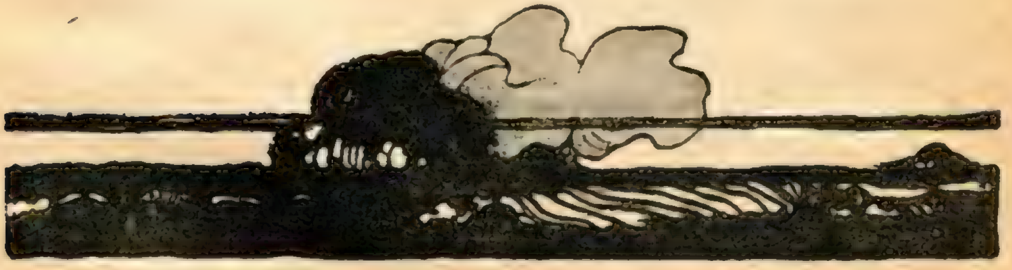
"Boss, I—I just naturally call that little bet, and if you don't mind I'd like to raise you with another."

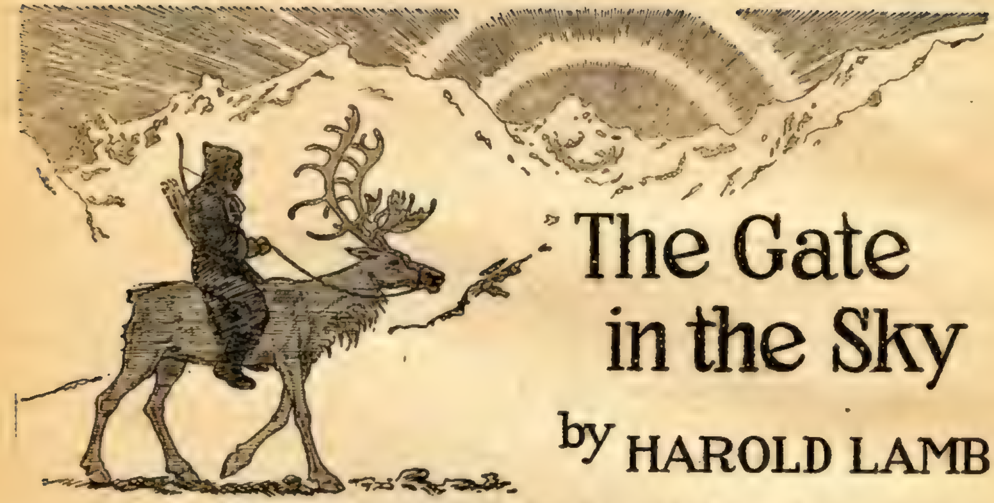
"Shoot," demanded the studious official.

Bradley grinned in appreciation.

"Chief, I'll bet you my resignation against that down-river post that the man you just spoke about has laid his last bet. Are—are you game to call that one?"

"Called!" said the chief like a proper good sport as he held out his hand.





The Gate in the Sky

by HAROLD LAMB

Author of "The Village of the Ghost," "The House of the Strongest," etc.

THE long night of Winter had begun. Snow-flurries swept the heights of the Syansk Range that separates Mongolia from Siberia proper. In that year early in the eighteenth century under the heights a great quiet had fallen.

Ice formed along the banks of the streams. Another week and the passes into the northern plain, with its scattered settlements, would be closed. The few traders who still lingered in the Syansk were hurrying down to the towns, several hundred miles away.

More and more the play of the northern lights obscured the brightness of *Upener*, the polar star.

As he had done for a score of years Maak, the Buriat reindeer-keeper, led his herd from the upland pastures down to the valleys where the streams were still open and the larches had a thin garment of foliage.

His beasts were sleek from a season's cropping of lichen and Pamir grass. Their coats were growing heavier against the frost that was sending to cover all animal life on the heights. Two hundred or more, they followed obediently the white reindeer that was Maak's mount.

Maak's broad face was raised to the sky of evenings. His keen, black eyes followed the flicker of elusive lights above and behind the mountain summits. A gate, he knew, was ready to open in the sky, and through it the spirits—the *tengeri*—would look down on the earth.

This happened only occasionally, when the magic lights were very bright in the Autumn—as now. For those who saw the open gate in the sky it was an omen. An omen of death or great achievement—one would not know which until time brought fulfilment.

"Some day the gate in the sky will open," he repeated to himself quietly as he watched of nights.

It might well mean death when he would be drawn up by the *Qoren Vairgin*, the king-spirit of the reindeer. Then he would make brave sport among the flaming lights and perhaps look forth in his turn from the spirit gate upon the whole world—upon the Mongolian plain whence the Chinese merchants sometimes came to barter for the soft horns of a young reindeer, to the towns from which the Russian colonist traders arrived every other year or so. Maak knew of no world other than this.

At times he wondered whether the gate would ever open.

Maak had seen no living being but his clansmen, the Buriats—and had seen them only in the Spring and Fall changes of pasture. He belonged to the wandering ones of the clan, the reindeer-keepers. He had been told that the traders were superior fellows indeed.

Never did Maak leave his reindeer. The herd furnished him milk and fat. His long coat, soft boots and cap were of their skins. His bowstring was reindeer gut; the skinning-knife he inherited from his father, who had been a herder.

No one had ever seen Maak kill one of his herd. When he wanted meat he shot down other game with his bow. He was as lean as the reindeer—with long, supple muscles that hid his strength. His slant eyes were mild.

This shyness of Maak came from long isolation. Barely did he remember the chants of a dead grandfather—chants of Mongol warriors who had taught the meaning of fear to their enemies.

Traders who learned that Maak—like the other wandering ones—did not kill his reindeer or sell them—the traders laughed, saying that he was mad, a *khada-ulan-obokhod,* an old man of the mountain—a spiritless coward.

"He has turned into a deer," they said, "with only enough wit to run away. Pah. He would not fight even for his own life!"

Nevertheless the other Buriats were superstitious about *khada-ulan-obokhod* and did not molest them.

AS THEY came to a bend in the upper valley Maak's mount, an old white buck, halted with lifted muzzle. The herd, following the example of their leader, stopped and bunched together, eyes and ears pointed in the same direction.

They were in sight of a large stream that gave into the Irkut. Beside the river were three canvas tents and a knot of pack-horses. Smoke rose into the chill evening air. Three men came from the fire and looked at them.

Maak would have turned when one of the travelers, a stocky, bearded man in a fine mink coat, waved to him.

Now Maak had been seeking that very spot to camp for the night. When the men invited him by gestures to join them he hesitated. Finally he edged the reindeer up to the tents and dismounted.

They were traders; the bearded man a Siberian colonist; a handsome, brisk young fellow was Orani, a Yakut half-breed; the third a silent Mongol.

"Greetings, *nim tungit*—tent companion," Orani, who acted as interpreter, proclaimed.

Maak nodded and accepted their hospitality shyly. His herd he let to graze on the moss in a birch grove, out of sight of the tents.

They gave him a luxurious brick of tea, and all four quaffed numberless bowls of the potent liquid as they sat around the fire.

"We have no meat, —— take the luck!" explained Orani. "Game is bewitched around here and our bullets all miss. Sell us one of your fine, plump beasts and we'll have a feast; eh, Maak?"

The reindeer-keeper shook his head. The men exchanged glances, and the Siberian, Petrovan, looked angry.

The traders had had ill luck with more than game for the pot. The fur they were taking back from the Syansk was a poor lot—some fair mink, but only a few ermine and no black foxes at all. The Mongol hunters were harder than ever to deal with. Petrovan considered it a personal grievance. Until now his Summer trading had been good.

"The gentleman," informed Orani, "will give you a powder-flask and a handful of bullets for a brace of deer. Come, Maak; strike a bargain, man!"

Absently the Buriat shook his head. He had no musket, and he was admiring the business-like hunting-piece of the trader and Orani's silver-mounted flintlock. He offered them some of his reindeer milk; they declined with a grimace, but the ever hungry Mongol emptied all portions down his gullet.

Orani was surprized that Maak had no gun. How did he deal with bear and moose?

"They do not trouble me," said Maak after he had thought it over.

He was slow to think things out.

"Well, you're a fine fellow all right," agreed the half-breed. "Look here, we're on the trail to the Irkut, going to Irkutsk. Come along with your herd; sell them in Irkutsk, and I'll wager they fetch a good price. Then you'll be rich like this gentleman here, and have tobacco enough to smoke every minute until you die, and a horse and sleigh."

He gulped the heavy smoke of his pipe down into his lungs, and glanced keenly at the Buriat.

The creases in Maak's leathern face changed as he rubbed some more tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. His black eyes twinkled. Maak had come as near as possible to a smile.

"No," he grunted. "What would I do without *them?*"

He pointed at the white buck that lingered near his tent.

When the Siberian retired to the big tent with a rug on the earth and a cot and lantern, Maak examined it from the opening with great appreciation. He was the last to retire to shelter from the cold.

The evening had been an eventful one. Maak would have enough to think about all Winter. He had been entertained by a trader.

It was long after Maak had disappeared that Orani came out of his tent and moved silently off into the dark. An hour later the half-breed returned, and sought his blankets.

The camp by the stream was motionless except for the anxious movements of a big reindeer and the illusion of motion produced by the play of the northern fires in the sky.

THE next morning they had no glimpse of *Qoren Vairgin*, the king of the spirit-world who drives the sun across the sky behind flying, white reindeer. Heavy clouds, settling athwart the snow-peaks of the Syansk, hid the sun.

"Snow is coming in the valley," muttered the Mongol servant to Orani.

Thoughtfully the half-breed nodded but made no move to rise from his blankets by the fire.

The reindeer-keeper also had noted the signs in the sky. He lingered for a while hoping to see the departure of the trader, he even ventured to offer Petrovan some tobacco.

"Pah!" the trader grunted to Orani. "I would rather smoke dried horse-droppings. These mountain men are mongrels."

Orani's slant eyes narrowed and his hand went instinctively to his knife. When Petrovan had traded or gambled in a bad streak of luck the Siberian was accustomed to slur Orani's mixed parentage.

"They are no better, excellency," he retorted, "than the overfed hounds that lie in the ditches of Irkutsk."

More than once Petrovan had been carried out of these same ditches when drunk.

Orani did not touch his knife, for he saw the other's eyes on him sidewise and knew that Petrovan's heavy pistol was in his belt. The Siberian shrugged and fell to watching Maak, who had mounted the white buck and was mustering his herd.

Two beasts were missing—young bucks that often strayed. Maak was anxious to work down into the larch and beech forests before the snow came, and he set out in search of the two reindeer.

He cast up the mountainside to the edge of the snow-line without finding reindeer or tracks. Then he circled down, looking into the gullies where moss-beds might have tempted his pets. Maak knew his charges as a shepherd knows his sheep. Reindeer were in fact very much like sheep.

When he had searched vainly for two hours Maak headed back to camp expecting that the missing animals would have returned to the herd. Glancing into a ravine giving into the river, he stiffened in his saddle.

Below him lay the young reindeer, their throats cut. Maak bent over them and saw that they had been dead for many hours. He looked for the place where steaks might have been cut from the haunches. A puzzled glare came into his black eyes.

His first thought had been that the Mongol servant or Orani had butchered the half-tame animals to get the meat he had refused to sell. But no meat had been taken from the carcasses. Only the throats had been cut.

Suddenly Maak grunted and climbed into the small saddle on the shoulders of the stalwart white buck. He raced the short distance into camp, and found that there was no longer a camp. Even his skin tent had been kicked down and thrown on the fire.

Men, horses and reindeer herd had disappeared. Maak was a figure turned to stone. He was thinking out the thing slowly. Some one had killed his two animals—some one who knew that he would search for them, perhaps for hours, and leave the herd unwatched.

He trotted around the ashes of the fire, found the trail that led north along the stream. The ground was frozen, but here and there patches of fern and bracken told him what he wanted to know. His herd had been driven off, bunched, followed by horses.

Petrovan had taken his reindeer.

The thought stung Maak into action. The vacant stare hardened in his eyes and his hands clenched. With worried, anxious movements he urged the white reindeer after the herd. He was angry, puzzled.

Why had the trader tried to steal his herd? The Siberian had more than an hour's start, yet Maak knew that he would be up with the fugitives before noon, so swiftly did his white beast eat up distance. Then, of course, Petrovan must give him back his reindeer. What else could be done?

Three hours later, rounding a turn in the ravine, Maak heard the *whang* of gun in his face and the shrill flight of a bullet close overhead.

He did not stop. A second report, and dirt flew up under the nose of the white buck. Then Maak knew that this was no strange jest of the gentleman's—no attempt to beguile him to the Siberian towns with his herd. He, Maak, had been robbed of the herd that had been his father's and his grandfather's. If he tried to follow the thieves they would kill him as speedily as they had butchered the two young deer.

With a wild cry the Buriat turned his steed aside and scrambled headlong away up the mountain slope, pursued by shots from Petrovan's gun and a shout of laughter from where Orani hid behind the rocks.

Maak passed from sight swiftly, for the heavy flakes of snow began to screen the mountain from the river and to cover all traces of the vanished herd.

ONLY one thing troubled Orani; they had let Maak know, before they decided on the rape of the herd, that they were headed for Irkutsk.

"Do you think the old man of the mountain would sneak after us to the settlement?"

Petrovan laughed until his beard bristled at the thought.

"I'd like to see him before a magistrate!"

Orani spat and closed one eye.

"This snow," he muttered. "Two days it has snowed and the —— himself could not smell out hoof-marks under a foot of—this. But, you see, excellency, we have had to go slowly, driving this accursed herd, and Maak knows that we must have gone through the northern pass to Irkutsk. It would be better if we had not told him."

They both looked back at the ragged rock-summits of the Syansk, now coated from river to summit with unbroken white save where the gray network of forest showed.

No living thing was to be seen. Their spirits had mounted since leaving the pass unmolested, although they knew that the heavy snow—just now ceased—had covered their flight.

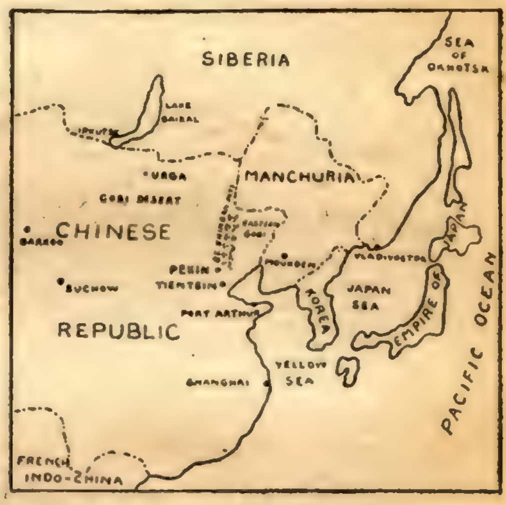
Petrovan shrugged.

"A rabbit couldn't come near us out here without being seen, you fool! That rascal of a Maak was frightened out of his senses by my shots. He is as timid as that white mongrel stag he rides. Come now; tonight we camp on this bank of the river."

Petrovan was indolent about crossing streams before making camp.

"Tomorrow, by the holy relics, we'll be across the Irkut and on the Siberian steppe."

Somewhat to their surprize the silent Mongol slavey broke into tongue as they rode down to the river—now wide and swift and to be forded only here for many miles. He wanted to cross the water before making camp.



"He is afraid that that dog of a Maak will make magic back yonder on the mountains," leered Orani.

The half-breed swore at the Mongol, and they made camp where they were. Orani rather wished Maak had shown up again. He wanted a shot at the Buriat—Petrovan had made a mess of the shooting.

While Petrovan snored through the night the half-breed sat with his back to a broad tree, watching, by the intermittent flickering in the sky, lest a thin, black figure try to approach the herd over the snow.

No one came. The herd edged about restlessly, seeking moss under the snow. Their flanks were beginning to fall lean. They had been driven hard. All their instincts led them to follow blindly after the one who happened to be the leader.

"Well, they will carry their skins a good way for us yet," remarked Petrovan the next morning as the men were preparing to mount. "We can get a good price for the skins."

"We might have had the white buck," grumbled Orani, "if you had attended to the old man of the mountain that night in his *yurt*."

He had had his vigil for nothing. Even Orani—who had attended to more than one man who was in his way—would not try to ambush three riders in daylight. And Maak, who had only a bow, could never attempt it now. Moreover, on the snow-bound steppe not a rabbit could hide.

"Gr-rh!" hissed Petrovan. "The river will be cold—look at the ice on the bank!"

He was glad that they would not have to swim their horses more than half-way over the ford. Even the shaggy steppe ponies did not relish the embrace of the black Irkut; but the reindeer scarce heeded it as Orani drove the herd down, crashing through the border of thin ice, out on the ford.

Petrovan hitched up his knees and yelled for the Mongol to wait with the pack-animals until the reindeer had crossed. He had fortified himself with black tea and brandy, and the blood raced through his stout body, well protected by the mink coat.

"Hey," he shouted to the servant, "take care of those packs or I'll send you to trim the ——'s corns!"

Now that he was leaving the Syansk behind his mood was pleasant. Not that he had been alarmed by the Mongol's remark that Maak was perhaps making magic, sitting on one of the peaks of his hills, talking to his *tengeri*, spirits. But Petrovan had feared that even in the snow-storm the reindeer-keeper might find his herd and cut it out.

"He is like the reindeer after all," Petrovan thought. "He is a *khada-ulan-obokhod*, an old man of the mountain. Where he is driven, he will go."

Then the Siberian scowled. His horse was swimming, and in spite of his efforts to keep dry the man was wet to his waist. An icy chill shot through his nerves.

"What in the fiend's name are you about?" he roared at Orani.

The half-breed, almost across the Irkut, had let the reindeer get out of hand. The leaders of the herd had no sooner gained footing on the farther bank than they about-faced, throwing the great mass of animals into confusion.

Orani bellowed and waved his arms to no avail. The herd churned the water, tossing their horns. Then they started back toward the Mongol and Petrovan.

At the same instant Petrovan stopped cursing and Orani ceased his unavailing shouts. A white buck paced down the farther bank to the river-edge, and on the white buck was Maak.

They had heard the reindeer-keeper give no command, but the herd went before him as he splashed into the water. They could see that his face had changed. Fasting had thinned it, and it wore a fixed smile.

Orani's musket cracked. He had pulled it forward from his back where it had been slung. His pony, however, was flustered by the reindeer, and the bullet carried wide.

Hastily the half-breed reloaded and settled himself in the saddle. Maak's white buck was swimming toward him steadily, not twenty paces away. Ten paces. Orani held his shot, sure of his aim this time.

Maak was leaning forward, one hand on the antlers of his beast. The water was up to his belly.

"Ho!" he shouted.

His free right hand went back to his shoulder. An arrow flashed in it; the bow held on his other hand twanged and as the musket of Orani flashed the reindeer-keeper threw himself sidewise into the water.

"Hide of the ——!" muttered Petrovan.

He could see the arrow sticking in Orani's throat. The half-breed slumped into the black surface of the Irkut.

"They are both dead," thought the trader. "Well, that is not so bad."

Nevertheless his nerves were running chill, and he turned his horse's head back to the Syansk shore, in the midst of the herd. The reindeer could be brought under control, and Orani's wages were clear profit.

These calculations were ended by a glance over his shoulder. Close behind him the antlers of the white buck were gaining on his tired horse. Beside the black muzzle of the reindeer was Maak's fur-tipped head.

The eyes of the reindeer-keeper were fixed on the trader. One hand gripped the antlers of the white buck. His bow had disappeared, rendered useless in any event by submergence in the river.

The teeth of Petrovan clinked together and his jaw quivered as he reached vainly for the musket slung to his back. He was a bulky man, and the sling was tight. Moreover the pony under him, nearly exhausted, was unsteady.

Petrovan was up to his chest in water. Cold fingers gripped at his groin, and his teeth chattered harder than ever.

"Keep away!" he shrieked. "I swear I will pay—pay for your herd."

Still Maak smiled.

"By the mercy of God," the trader's cry went on, "I swear I will pay twice over. The herd is yours—you hear? Yours!"

It did not occur to him in his fright that Maak did not understand Russian and knew not what he was saying. The other's silence wrought on Petrovan's mounting fear, and he snatched out his pistol from his belt, which was now under water.

Maak's head was only a man's length away, and the trader twisted in his unstable seat to pull the trigger as swiftly as his chilled fingers permitted. The flint clicked harmlessly on the steel that could not ignite the wet powder.

Shifting the man's weight caused the pony to sink and lurch. Petrovan was in the water where sharp hoofs struck and darted on every side. One split his cheek open. The heavy coat, water-soaked, and the musket weighed him down. An icy cold strangled the breath in his throat and numbed his heart.

But the panic that gripped him was from the man who floated after him, the man who walked forward against gunshots, who smiled at the weapon in Petrovan's hand and whom the deadly cold of the river could not hurt.

Petrovan clutched wildly at the antlers of a reindeer swimming by, missed and was struck again by a hoof. His arms moved weakly now, and his head went under.

Maak, numbed and helpless from submergence in the water, could only cling to the antlers of the white buck. As impotent to aid Petrovan as to harm him, the reindeer-keeper was drawn into shoal water and to the shore.

Turning here, he saw Petrovan's bare head an instant at the edge of the shore ice. Then the trader went down. Maak grunted and glanced at the Mongol, his hand moving toward the knife in his belt.

But the erstwhile servant of Petrovan was building a fire on the ashes of the old campfire. The Mongol, who was trembling a little, motioned for Maak to draw near and warm himself. Then he pointed out the pack-animals, saying that they were Maak's and that he—the Mongol—had never had aught but peace in his heart toward a *khala-uban-obokhod*.

Not until Maak had dried himself and eaten a little of the bread and tea of the other did he respond. Then he said that the packs and the ponies could go with the Mongol. Maak did not want them. He had his herd again.

"It was a strong *îjin*—magic spell—that you made on the mountain heights. It bewitched the guns and slew the Russian pig without a blow. Is not that the truth?"

So spoke the Mongol.

"Nay."

Maak shook his head.

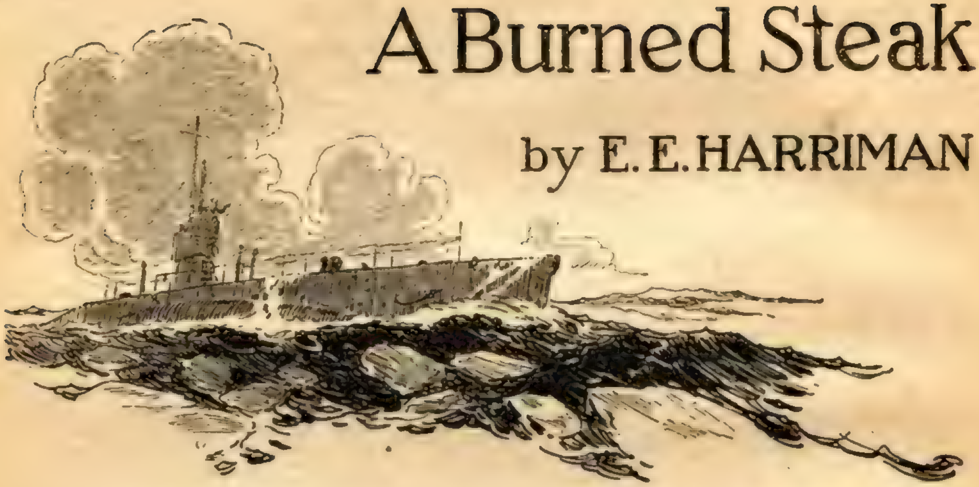
"I went to the mountain-top to see the camp of the thieves when the snow ceased. Otherwise I could not have seen it."

The Mongol was silent. He was in no mood to contradict his guest. But later among the Buriats he voiced the thought in his mind.

"Maak has looked into the spirit gate. When he sat on the mountain looking for his enemies the gate in the sky was open. He talked with the *Qoren Vairgin* and his spirit ancestors."

And the Mongol spoke truth, though not in the way he thought. The urge to do battle for the herd that was dearer to Maak than his own life was a heritage of forgotten ancestors.

Maak had looked through the gate in the sky.



A Burned Steak

by E. E. HARRIMAN

Author of "The Judgment of the Desert," "The Obstinacy of Bill Robbins," etc.

PRIMARILY it was a very good steak, thick, red and juicy. Ordinarily Jessie Conway would have cooked it to the perfect satisfaction of her husband, Sheridan Conway, naval radio operator, first class. However, the great war had a lot to do with the burning of that steak; and the black hue of the steak, with its accompanying dryness, had a lot to do with a number of other things. It seems hardly credible that Sheridan Conway would— But wait. I am getting ahead of my story.

Sheridan had served well into his second hitch when the war began. Being a Virginian, he chafed during our neutrality and hailed our entrance into the war with gusto. At once he applied for a transfer to the aviation division. After many days his application was returned to him with an official endorsement. Some human machine, created to thwart ambition, had written across the application—

Application denied and applicant transferred to submarine division on acc't of past record.

"——!" said Sherry. "I want to soar with the gulls and kittiwakes, so he sends me down among the conger eels and flatfish. Fine!"

The old Q9 was in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, getting polished up. The department installed a pair of ears in her bows, did the possible with her engines and threw her back in the bay. Sherry Conway drew a seat on a small tool-chest, and a stethoscope connected with those ears.

"I'll say the Huns are easy picking if they let a tin fish like this get away with any real stuff over there," he told the chief machinist. "She is about big enough for tarpon-bait."

"Ye-uh, but I've seen a darned big dog shy off from a rattler not more'n half the size of his own tail," answered the C. M. "You wait."

The Q9 returned to her moorings in New York Harbor after the Hun had squealed and the nations had agreed to an armistice. Her crew hailed the armistice delightedly. They were fed up on strafing. They thought they were through with helldiving in dangerous places, but they counted without Washington. The war was over, but some politicians still retained their sense of curiosity. She had made a record as a poison little sidewinder, hard to catch, quick to strike, tenacious of life. She had nosed about over many square miles of mud bottom, had given more than one Hun crew the scare of their lives and had been officially credited with one Hun submersible destroyed.

She had hunted this prowling pirate for half a day, knowing that he was hunting her, then had risen swiftly, with all tanks blown, to see the Hun broadside on and dead ahead. The Q9 had barely shaken the salt water out of her eyes when her commander had started both bow whales out to

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"A Burned Steak," copyright, 1922, by E. E. Harriman.

carry greetings to the Hun and dived like a loon.

The Q9 did the shimmy violently, buckled and heeled over, then rose. A spread of oil, some débris and four mussy-looking Huns, floating up, proved the case.

"*Requiescat in* pieces," said two-and-a-half-striper Griffin and departed with his hellcat boat, after another victim.

Once in a storm the Q9 had spiked herself on a reef. Everybody began to wonder what came next after "now I lay me" when another wave boosted her clear over the reef into deep water. Swift action plugged the holes before the sea-water and the batteries had got into action with the chlorin gas to any extent, and the crew, remembering how she had dodged the Tirpitzian repartee in the fight that gave them a star, called the Q9 a lucky boat but a —— awkward one.

Her stay in foreign waters was uneventful aside from a few such little *contretemps*, but far from prosaic. American and English chasers and destroyers, whose commanders believed in shooting first and talking later, contributed many ash-cans to keep her crew awake and busy. The bow guns on one American destroyer reduced her periscope to junk, and twice they were bombarded at long range in the night, when some vigilant Yank discerned a black streak on the water.

Between the Hun subs that played ring-around-the-rosy with them and the neighborly attentions received from the surface boats, life was just one —— thing after another; but the worst of all was what the old Pittsburgh stogy handed them herself. This was the verdict of her crew from commander down, unanimously declared.

"No chance to move for fear she will dive or rise when she should run level. No fresh air except at night, on her multiple —— back. Bread with whiskers on it—green ones at that; and canned rations till we all got tin-lined innards. In Winter a skim of ice over her shell and no artificial heat allowed. No wonder we got sniffy and mean."

So said Chief Electrician Wall, ashore in New York.

"We all had the darnedest case of the nerves you ever heard of, and a grin never showed unless we did something to a Hun. 'Sparks' Conway, one of our listening detail, put it right. 'These things get on your nerves, just like a sliver in your thumb that is too small to find, but pricks every time you pick anything up.' Sherry hit it plumb center."

Sherry came home outwardly calm, but tense as an E string on a violin that is tuned to concert pitch. Jessie, his wife, was thin, jumpy, with big, staring eyes that had blue shadows all around them. They were glad to be united once more, but every revolution of the marital machine showed that something had thrown emery in the bearings. Neither realized just what was wrong, for neither stopped to consider.

"The *Cambridge* is in port," said Sherry, the second day at home. "I am going down and collect fifteen bucks off Bill Reilly or get Bill a hospital billet. That swab has owed me that much since we were at Puerto Plata, pacifying the nigger revolutionists."

He found Bill, and the gunner's mate dug up the fifteen bucks.

"I'd 'a' paid ye long ago, only you transferred to the *Spokane* an' then into a sub," Bill explained. "Goin' to reenlist?"

"Not on your figurehead! I'm no hog, and I know when I've got my bellyful. In eight days I'll be a free man, and I'll say the man who buncoes me into taking on a third hitch is a lallapaloosa."

"Bet ye ten bucks you take on again inside sixty days," said Bill.

"You're on. I'm going ashore right now and buy a steak as thick as my wrist and as big as the gaff-tops'l on an English cutter, just to celebrate collecting this money and being so close to freedom. When I win that ten off you I'll buy another and celebrate again."

"Yah!" jeered Bill. "You stand no more show of winnin' that ten than I do of bein' admiral afore night. Double that bet, hey?"

Sherry declined to double and went ashore. He bought the steak.

"My!" said Jessie as he gave her the steak. "What a steak for two!"

"Some big, but I've got an appetite for four," answered Sheridan. "There won't be anything left but the smell when I finish."

It had to be a skillet broil, since the Conway ménage allowed no other. A skillet broil is all right if the cook stands right over the skillet and flops the steak over every thirty seconds till it is cooked. A skillet broil is like an American wife—it tolerates no divided or half-hearted allegiance. Handled right, and with a big lump of butter melting on its surface, such a broil is seductive.

All might have gone well with the steak and the Conway *entente cordiale* had Sherry found a clean handkerchief. He had shaved, bathed, dressed, polished and brushed. Then came a ten-minute hiatus, followed by a hail for Jessie. Sherry had run aground.

"I want a clean handkerchief and there isn't a blamed one," he said.

"There are more than a dozen in your drawer," she replied stoutly.

"I've raked the thing from stem to gudgeon. They're not there."

"Get out of the way and let me look," said Jessie, fork in hand.

It kept her looking for five minutes, but she found them, rolled up inside of a flannel shirt he had shoved about impatiently.

"Lord, what a place to keep 'em!" grunted Sherry.

"You threw that shirt in there yourself," snapped Jessie stiffly. "I hung it on a chair to air a little, as always, and you threw it in. Then you just pawed like a mule till you had it all mussed up and the kerchiefs rolled up inside. I thought the Navy taught neatness."

"Can the lecture," said Sherry, all at once the petty officer rather than the husband of the prettiest girl in the block. "Something's burning!"

Jessie shrieked and fled. She snatched the saucepan of spuds off the gasplate, turned them with her fork, then set the pan in a deeper vessel of cold water to remove the scorched taste.

She turned to the steak and gasped. Her finger flipped the lever around that shut off the gas. Her lip began to quiver. That huge and luscious steak had dried to leather and burned black around the edges.

"I could cry if it would do any good," she told herself. "I will anyhow if Sherry is cross. I can't help it."

Sherry did not scold. He merely became stiff and overly polite. He made quite an elaborate show of peeling the burned portions of the steak in order to salvage a bit for Jessie. Then he put on the air of a martyr and ate a morsel himself.

Under this infliction his wife lost her self-control and said things. Sherry retorted, and she gave him a shot below the waterline.

"You mussed things up and then called me just at the most critical time," she said. "I think you are the one to blame for the burned steak."

Then Sherry got mad, and the net result was a row, winding up with Jessie in tears and Sherry reaching for his uniform cap.

"So this is what I have come home to, is it?" he remarked, rising.

"I think you are horrid to treat me so," answered Jessie, slumping.

The fat was in the fire; and Sherry walked out, very stiff in the back and correct in attire, slamming the door just enough to emphasize his last remark. An hour later he had signed his name to papers that bound him to serve his national uncle for four years more dating from discharge.

"—— it! There goes ten bucks to Bill," he reflected as he came out to the street. "Better pay than be whined at and cried at, though."

He wandered about the city until he felt sure that Jessie would be sound asleep, then let himself into their apartment. There was a big couch in the little living-room. He would bunk there, so he would not disturb Jessie and set her off sniffling again.

He slipped his shoes off, tiptoed in, found his pajamas and came back to the couch without turning on a light. He eased himself down.

"Ouch!" said the voice of Jessie as something gave under him.

"Good Lord!" said Sherry, bouncing up. "What are you here for?"

"To sleep, of course," said a sleepy voice. "You sat on my legs and it hurt. There is a whole bed in the other room, waiting for you."

Sheridan grabbed his pajamas and hurried out. He slipped into the bed and stretched luxuriously, not without some few qualms over Jessie on the hard couch. It was a poor thing compared to the bed.

A FEW days passed with little jangles jingling unaccountably. In due course his discharge came and Jessie perked up. The very next day came an order to report on board the Q9 for duty. Jessie went white.

"Have you— Did you—" she said, and could not finish, her eyes big.

"Yep. The day the steak burned I signed up for another hitch. I suppose I made a —— fool of myself, to put it in my language."

Jessie did not reply, but went to her room looking wilted. Sherry took a step toward the door, hesitated, turned and went out. When he reported on board the two-and-a-half-striper commander, captain by courtesy, mustered the crew and explained in careful language.

"Somebody's darling from Washington wants to see just how we did it over yonder. The Q9 is the hare and three destroyers are the hounds with Long Island Sound as the field. We start at once."

"Cold as Hindenburg's heart and ice-floes running. It'll be one sweet picnic, I don't think," muttered the chief machinist.

"What is that, Burrell?" demanded the captain sharply.

"I said the ice is running thick, sir," came the prompt reply.

"Oh! Yes, you are right. Back out and turn. Half-speed, Mr. Stevens. We submerge off Long Neck Point. They will endeavor to prevent our passing The Race and Fisher's Island undiscovered."

The destroyers were drawing black streaks across the sky when the Q9 filled her fore, aft and midships ballast tanks, the trimming, adjusting and auxiliary tanks. She sank out of sight, periscope and all.

The water was full of ice, and the grinding rasp of huge blocks on the thin steel shell was deafening. Not until they straightened out on the five-fathom level did the noise cease. Even then the sound of ice on ice came to them loudly.

Sheridan had the stethoscope tubes in his ears and was trying to judge the movements of the destroyers by sound. Stevens, first luff, was in consultation with Captain Griffin.

"Keep this level with a starboard helm. (—— it, I should have said right.) In fifteen minutes port your helm and hold for fifteen."

Captain Griffin grinned, as he met the amused glance from the first luff over his break about the wording of an order.

Zigzagging up the sound for a few miles, the sub dropped to the bottom and lay quiet in seven fathoms. A destroyer passed over her and roared off into the distance. Twin beats came from the north and south, telling of the other hounds and their positions.

The sub lifted gently from her mud bed, turned her nose back toward Port Chester and speeded up. Within five minutes Sherry reported all three of the destroyers in hot pursuit. Then the Q9 turned again.

"Six fathoms and sneak," came the order.

The motors hummed low, and the submersible moved gently forward on an easterly course while the three destroyers raced crashingly through broken ice and roughened water westward. Just before they reached the Q9 the sub sank and lay quiet once more. The destroyers lost the scent and stopped their engines, listening for the beat of propeller-blades.

Then they started once more and ramped through the spume and ice toward Port Chester. The sub began to creep cautiously toward the passage past Fisher's Island and Big and Little Gull. The instant Sherry reported the destroyers as turning, the motors stopped and she settled a third time among the oysters.

Not a man moved from his station. Not a hammer or wrench clinked on engine, motor or hull. Absolute silence reigned, just as it had in channel waters when Hun ears were harkening.

At the end of two hours Sheridan reported no sound save the grind and crash of ice. The sweating shell had formed a frosty coat of ice on its inner surface. The thermometer beside the captain's station registered eight below and was still falling.

"Start the pumps on the main ballast tank," came the order. "Time to emerge. Second dog watch just gone. Easy on the pumps. We may bump."

Slowly the sub lifted from its bed. Slowly it rose, while the men waited and the captain watched the depth-gage. Came a light bump and the Q9 stopped. The indicator needle wavered at ten feet.

"Under a floe. Take in ballast," said the captain. "Take her out farther and try again. It can't be the whole sound is covered."

They failed again, and the captain sent her out through The Race and turned toward the open sea. Once more he tried, and for the third time the conning-tower struck ice. Turning the hydroplanes, he sent her off in a long, slanting dive. Fifty—a hundred—two hundred feet, and only a drop of two fathoms. Then she struck with a shock and a tearing, ripping sound, as if some giant were disemboweling her.

"Full speed astern," yelled Captain Griffin, and the chief electrician reversed swiftly.

The sub drove back stern first, and all felt her release herself. Then the chief electrician stopped the motors. At once she began to sink by the head, fast and at a nearly vertical slant.

The descent had begun so swiftly that it had cut off the command of the first luff to take bilge soundings. The captain's yell of "Blow your tanks!" had brought no result as the man at the manifold had been thrown half-way down the forward battery deck and now hung by the butterfly bolts of the battery pilot-cell.

Every man on board from the captain down was clinging for dear life to anything he could catch. The Q9 was diving as when her whales raced after a Hun boat. Clinging with one hand and both legs, the chief electrician reversed the motors, and the drag of the propeller began to retard the dive. Then she bumped rather gently and lay over on her port side at about forty degrees.

"Some one bring pliers and pull this pin," ordered "the old man," as he stared at the depth-gage. "That needle has been jammed."

Sherry Conway freed himself from two members of the crew who lay across his body and pulled the pin. The indicator spun round from two hundred, where the pin had held it, to two eighty.

"Humph!" grunted Captain Griffin. "Eighty below our limit, eh? A pretty how-d'ye-do. Wall, you did a mighty good thing when you set the motors in reverse. Going at the rate we were, we would have gone plumb to smash when we hit bottom if it had not been for that. Blow tanks, Burrell. Water coming in around all shafting in spurts."

"They refuse to blow, captain," came the report after two trials. The captain figured a moment, then looked up quietly, speaking gently.

"Of course not. Air-pressure seventy-five. Sea pressure one twenty. Start the pumps and see what they can do. Ease the clutch in slow."

Over and over the machinists tried the pumps, and every time the clutch would slip. Then the men manned the hand-pumps, only to fail. "Take bilge soundings in all tanks and wells," came the next order. "Mr. Stevens, step this way and see if we can determine our bearings. I think I know within a mile or two, but that is too vague."

The officers bent over a depth-chart while the chief gunner's mate began to sound. All seemed safe and normal till the gunner's mate reached the forward main ballast tank. Here there was a thick glass dead-eye set in the deck, with a water-tight light inside the tank. The gunner's mate put his face close to this dead-eye, stared and then rocked back in a squatting position. His face had gone gray.

"There's a fish t' other side that dead-eye," he gasped. "I saw it."

Two others dropped above the glass and stared. Then they looked around at their mates in horror. The captain came forward.

"Two thirty-pounder fish makin' love to that light, captain," said one man. "She must have a hole in her a cow could walk through."

Captain Griffin looked, grunted and walked aft the few paces in the control section. He turned and came forward again, looking haggard.

"Men, we are so near to Davy Jones' locker that you can hear the hinges squeak, but we are not inside of it yet. All petty officers join your captain and chief officer in consultation. Everybody think hard, for it will take some scheming to get us out of here," he said.

THEN began a series of experiments that lasted for hours, but all alike failed. No sooner had one proved inadequate than some man sat up and raised his voice in advocacy of another. At last, Olson, Swede mariner and stolid butt of all jokes:

"Captain, Ay tank yo yust shoot me out das tube an' turn das salvage buoy loose vunce. Ay take das light vat burn van water hits it. Dan Ay gat holt of das buoy an' signal with das light."

"Good nerve, Olson, and I appreciate your offer, but have you thought of the ice and cold up there?" said the captain.

"Yas, but Ay can stand it," was the reply. "Long enough anyhow to signal so they save yo' an' the other fallers. It don't matter 'bout me."

"You're a real man, Olson; but there is another thing. You would be crushed by sea-pressure before you had gone ten feet. It won't do."

Dejectedly the Swede went back and sat down, his head hanging low.

"Cook, make a lot of coffee," said Captain Griffin. "We need it."

The men drank the coffee, which the cook prepared on the electric range. It warmed and heartened them. Sheridan walked over and looked at the thermometer. Down to fifteen below, and the ice skin inside the hull was beginning to look frosty, instead of glistening.

"Well, men, we know where we are, at any rate," the captain announced as he drained his cup. "Five miles off the eastern end of the island. Smooth bottom and an even, straight slant up to ten fathoms half a mile out. Anybody want to get out and walk in?"

"Can't we start the motors and push her along that slant, like a sled? She ought to slide fairly well," ventured Burrell.

"That ripped bottom would be catching every few feet," replied the captain. "That wouldn't work, but it gives me an idea. Can't we back up?"

At once every man was set at work, shifting every heavy weight that was movable far forward. Then half the crew, selecting the heaviest men, grouped as far forward as possible. The stern lifted a few inches.

"Start your motors in reverse. Port your helm till I give the word. We must make a turn of sixty-two degrees to set her tail right."

Captain Griffin waited anxiously to see what the clutch would do in turning the screw. The motors hummed and the clutch took hold. The thrash of the screw began to sound. The crew started a cheer, but it was cut off in the middle as the clutch slipped again.

"For dear Heaven's sake, do something to that infernal clutch so it will hold!" begged the captain. "Burrell, try something; do."

"I have tried broken and pulverized glass, captain. I have tightened the clutch all I dared. I have tried about forty other schemes that have been suggested. I'm at the end of my rope, captain," said Burrell.

"We can't experiment much more, captain, or the batteries will give out," warned the C. E. Wall. "Our next move must be worth while or it may leave us without motive power at all."

Sheridan Conway went to a tiny locker and took out a brass model of the Q9 that he had been making. With it he lifted a sheet of emery cloth and he sat down to begin polishing the brass. Wall, who had been very chummy with him, came over and sat down beside him.

"Sparks, what you got on your mind besides your hair? You look a lot too glum for just a little trouble like this. Losing your nerve?"

"No," answered Conway. "Just damning myself proper."

"What's up? Spill it," said Wall, looking away from Sheridan.

"I will. You know Jessie pretty well and know she is no whiner. Well, I made her cry her eyes out, acting the swine over nothing. She let a steak burn because I called her away from it. Then I put on a lot of superior airs and acted high and mighty. We were both set for trouble someway, and it only took a little to tip us into a real, first-class row. She cried and I cussed. You know how it is.

"Then I went off while I was hot and took on for another hitch after promising her I wouldn't. Blast my eyes, but I would like to be home just long enough to tell her I'm sorry. No chance, though. It looks like curtains for us, and she will never know I was sorry. How long do you think we will live, Wall?"

"I don't know, Sparks. What's the dif? Funny you scrapped with Jess. I thought you cared too much for that, but I know why. Your nerves are ragged and sore from everything a sub can do to a man; and that's plenty. You felt sorry for yourself and didn't realize that she has gone to —— with you every day you were away. I tell you, Sparks, it's the women that get it the worst, and her nerves have been worn thin, just like an E string on a fiddle after it's been played on a long time."

"I believe you're right," said Sheridan Conway, speaking slowly. "I never thought of how much strain she had been under. —— a fool, Wall."

He dropped the little model in his lap and sat still, looking at the ice-coated hull only two steps away. His thumb rasped back and forth on the emery cloth. He was thinking hard.

He set his lips tightly, and his eyes narrowed to slits. His thumb paused in its rhythmic rubbing and he glanced down at the emery cloth. Suddenly he leaped to his feet and hurried over to Burrell.

"Burrell, I'll cut this emery cloth into squares and you feed them into the clutch hood. I believe it will work. It's got to work. I have an engagement on shore I can't break," he said, and whipped out a knife.

"Three cheers for Sparks Conway!" called the first luff as the clutch gripped on the emery-cloth scraps and began to whirl the screw. The men tried to cheer, but voices faltered and the cheers died out only half-uttered. They were listening to the propeller.

Captain Griffin kept his gaze on the depth-gage as its needle slowly retraced its course. He was silent, and the rest ceased talking.

Burrell stood over the clutch hood, giving orders in whispers to his assistants to find more emery cloth or sandpaper. Wall nursed his motors and ordered every light turned off to conserve juice for motors, save one which was indispensable to him and Burrell.

Sherry found a flashlight and stood behind the captain, turning it on the depth-gage dial. Gradually the depth decreased, but also the power weakened. Now they were moving only in jerks, showing that the batteries were nearly exhausted. Three of four lengths at a crawl, then a pause, followed by another crawl.

Every man was tense, expecting disaster at any moment, but hoping that it might sheer off and leave them. The gage showed that they had backed, crawfish fashion, up the slope to two-twenty. That meant more than four miles of distance.

Then the batteries quit. Not a jerk could Wall coax out of them. They refused even to hum.

Two men swore, as only deep-water sailors can swear. One cried with deep sobbing. Another said, reverently—

"O God!"

The filaments in the one bulb merely glowed redly, and Burrell got out another flashlight. None cared to die in the dark, and die they must. To come so far and then fail just below safety! It was hard.

"You man at the air manifold, try to blow the tanks," said the low voice of Captain Griffin. "There is a chance, a small one, but a chance."

The man turned the cocks that sent the compressed air hissing into the tanks. Instantly he yelled crazily:

"They're working! Feel her lift? We'll make it in spite of ——!"

Ten minutes later they were sniffing salt air from an open hatch, waiting for the captain to give the word that it was safe to go on deck.

"Conway, what would you like best, of all possible rewards I might secure for you for studying up that scheme?" asked the captain as they came in past the end of Ellis Island with the Diesel engines going full speed, every man cursing useless war-play.

"A billet on shore as naval radio operator at some decent station."

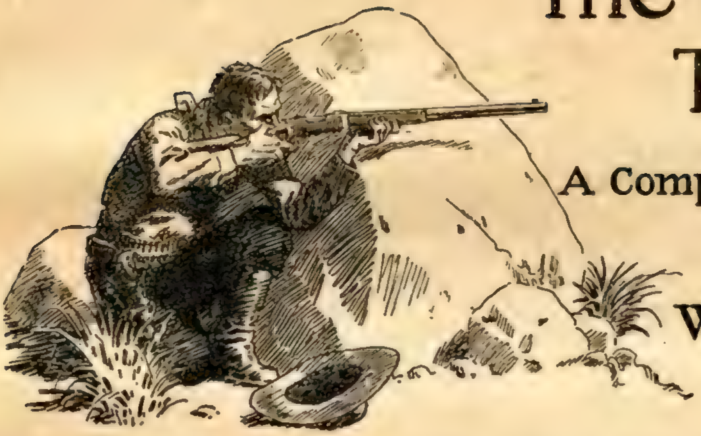
The reply came instantly and the captain smiled. He, too, knew Jessie.

"You shall have it if my influence can get it for you," he said.

Sherry looked away over the skyline of New York toward the part where Jessie waited his return, and his eyes shone.

"Thank you, captain. That is something to tell Jessie that is worth while," he said. "I'll spring it on her after I get through telling her how sorry I am that I let my nerves get the upper hand.

"No, I won't say that, either. I'll not plead nerves. I'll just say I got mad, like a fool, and let it go that way; but if I ever make that girl cry again in that way, may I be —— to a crippled sub in deep water; and there is no hell worse than that. There couldn't be. It's the limit."



The Closed Trail

A Complete Novelette

by

WM. WELLS

A THOUSAND head of beef, three-year-old steers, sleek and fat, the first drive of the season from the upper Verde, came slowly in a mile-long string down the desert trail.

On either side a half-dozen riders paced their horses back and forth, holding the cattle to the road, for it was mid-forenoon, and the herd, having been grazed forward from the night's bed-ground at Grass Creek for several hours in the cool of the morning, was now being trailed to the next water, that at the Sand Springs at the edge of the desert, which lay a few miles ahead.

Ahead, "on point," holding the lead steers to a steady walk, rode three men.

The middle one of the three was Frank Gorham, owner of the Boot outfit, the largest one of the upper valley. Of medium height, spare in build, with red hair and weatherbeaten face, burned to a brick red, from which looked humorous blue eyes, he had been known and feared on the border for twenty years as a man of reckless courage and daring and deadly skill with weapons; a good friend and a dangerous enemy.

On one side rode Buckner Ewing, a slender, black-haired youngster, whose father owned the Square and Compass; on the other Dick Lloyd, who held one of the smaller ranches.

Far down the trail a horseman came over the top of a rise and down its slope as fast as his horse could lay foot to the ground, a cloud of dust floating away behind him.

As he drew nearer Gorham spoke:

"Here comes the night wrangler like —— beating tan-bark. Now what do you reckon is up—wagon tipped over and killed the cook, or what?"

For the mess-wagon, together with the *remuda* of nearly a hundred saddle-horses had gone forward to make camp at the springs.

"What's the matter, Lengthy?" he asked the long-legged youth who pulled his panting horse up in front of him. "You seem in an awful sweat to get somewhere?"

"We can't get to the spring," the wrangler told him. "There's a fence across the trail and a big outfit camped at the spring and they say that the trail is closed."

Gorham stiffened in his saddle.

"What's that?" he asked sharply. "Just what I say," the wrangler told him; "we can't get to the spring."

"Boys," said Gorham, "I've got a hunch that ——'s broke loose again."

He turned and swung his hat to the men behind, who came forward on the run, swinging well out so as not to startle the cattle.

Gorham ran his eyes over the group.

"Bert," he said, "you and Fred and Billy stay here and hold the dogies. No back talk," he snapped, as the three luckless ones started to remonstrate. "The rest of you come with me and we'll go have a talk with these gentlemen that say the desert trail is closed."

As the little bunch of riders topped the rise over which the wrangler had appeared they stopped.

Ahead of them the desert ran to the horizon,

"The Closed Trail," copyright, 1922, by Wm. Wells.

its flat reaches of greasewood and rabbit-bush spotted with white patches of alkali and crossed by ridges, yellow with sun-cured grass, shimmering and dancing in the heat and glare of the sun.

Below them the waters of the spring, spreading out in little channels before sinking into the sand, kept green strips and patches of grass on which were grazing a couple of hundred saddle-horses, while at the spring three wagons and several tents showed that a large party was encamped.

A strong wire fence ran across the trail and vanished into the distance on either hand, and just inside of where it crossed the trail a group of thirty or more men lounged on their horses.

Just short of the fence stood the four-horse mess-wagon, the cook sitting crosswise on the seat, a pipe in his mouth, while nearby the day wrangler had the *remuda* bunched.

Gorham took off his hat and scratched his head.

"Wouldn't that jar you?" he inquired in a plaintive voice to no one in particular. "Here we come along all nice and friendly, not looking for trouble with anybody, and there's a bunch just aching for it, or I miss my guess. I sure am the unluckiest human that way that ever happened; if there's any trouble anywhere around it hunts me out every rattle out of the box."

He settled himself in his saddle, his face hardened and his voice took a new note.

"Come on, fellows," he said. "Let's get it over."

In front of the men inside the fence a man of thirty or so, with a rather handsome face but hard mouth and cold gray eyes, sat his horse with easy grace, and to him Gorham spoke.

"What outfit is this?" he wanted to know.

"The Broken Bow," the other told him.

"And I reckon you're running it?"

The other nodded.

"Yes," he replied.

"And might I ask your name?" Gorham went on.

"Crawford, Ed Crawford."

Gorham settled over to the left in his saddle, bringing his weight on to his left stirrup and loosening his right foot, while the well-trained cow-horse, obeying a slight touch of the bridle reins, made a quarter turn to the left.

"You half-bred cross between a Digger Indian and the fag-end of a misspent life," he said in a low and steady voice, "what do you mean by cluttering up the landscape with barbed wire in this way? Don't you know that somebody might run against it in the dark and get hurt?"

At the deadly insult Crawford's face went white, while on both sides men felt their muscles tighten for the bloody fight which they thought sure to follow. But Gorham's eyes never left Crawford's, and in a moment the latter spoke in a voice which he could not keep quite steady.

"The Broken Bow has bought the railroad lands and fenced them, and we are here to see that the fence stays," he said.

"Who's the big noise back of this deal?" Gorham wanted to know. "Is it Rivers?"

"No," Crawford told him, "Mr. James Newton has bought the Broken Bow, and if you want to talk to him he is at the ranch."

Gorham wheeled his horse.

"Then you're only a straw boss, and a —— poor one at that," he flung over his shoulder.

"Run up the cavey and everybody get fresh horses," he ordered. "Tom," he added to the cook, "take the wagon back to Grass Creek and make camp. Dick, you and Buck come with me and we'll go see this man Newton. The rest of you fellows drift the beef back to Grass Creek and hold 'em till we get back."

As the three rode off young Ewing spoke.

"Frank," he said, "dad always said that you were plumb locoed, and he was sure right. What were you trying to do, get the bunch of us killed off? That gang was three to one."

Gorham laughed.

"Son," he said, "always remember this: Get in the first bluff. You wouldn't have us turn tail and ride away like a lot of whipped dogs, would you? So I throwed a scare into that Crawford when he wasn't looking for it and it stuck. He, and all the rest of that bunch, will be a lot easier to handle after this, because they know we aren't afraid of them."

Back at the camp of the Broken Bow men were also discussing the encounter.

"Here's where another range war starts and she's going to be a lulu," said one. "That Verde bunch is a hard one to handle. Ten years ago they had a row with the Broken Bow—it was an English outfit then—and licked 'em to a frazzle, besides cleaning out a bunch of Indian Territory gunmen that Rivers sent in to help out. It's no cinch that they won't lick Jim Newton, for all that he's got the law on his side, for, you hear me, they're a tough crowd."

"What sort of a boss have we got, anyway?" asked a hard-faced youth. "I wouldn't have taken what he did from any man."

"Yes, you would, kid, or be out there on the flat with a chunk of lead through your ribs, along with a lot more of us," was the answer.

"Different times quite a lot of people got the idea that they didn't have to listen to Frank Gorham when he was talking right earnest, like he was today, and before they found out their mistake they was knocking at the Pearly Gate. Anybody that thinks they can beat that guy on the draw better take it out in thinking, because them sort of thoughts haven't been healthy up to date.

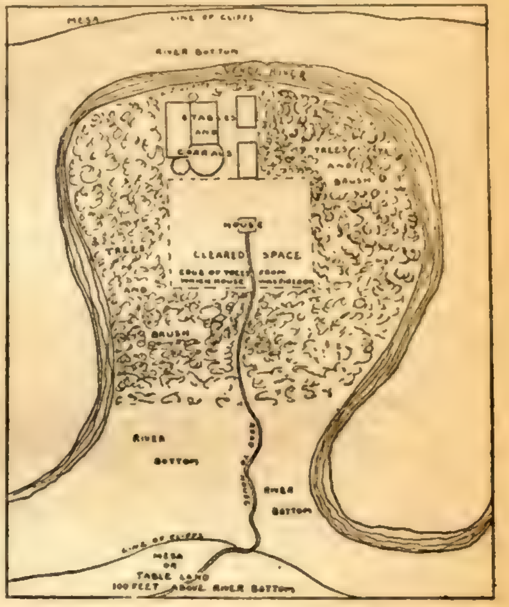
"Did you notice him settle over in his saddle and bring his spur up in the bronc's flank before he handed the boss that jolt? If Crawford had taken a shot at him he'd have socked in the spur, and when the bullet got there he'd have been elsewhere, and Crawford 'd have had a hole in his back-bone as big as your hat, and he knew it. Besides, you all heard Newton's orders to let the Verde bunch make the first break, and when Jim Newton says a thing he means it; he's a bad *hombre* himself."

II

GORHAM and his companions drew rein on top of the vari-colored cliffs of sandstone which hemmed in the mile-wide bottom-land of the Verde. Below them the river swung in long loops across the flat, bordered with clumps of cottonwood-trees and patches of brush, and in one of these horseshoe bends stood the great ranch-house of the Broken Bow.

This bend was thickly wooded, except that in front and at the sides of the house the trees and brush had been cleared away for a distance of several hundred feet, the road to the house winding through the trees.

Built according to the ideas of the Englishmen who came over to play the part of feudal lords in the boom days of the cattle business thirty years before, the house was of stone in the shape of a hollow square, two stories high. The only openings in the outer wall were a row of narrow windows heavily barred with iron in the upper story, and an archway with heavy gates opening into the inner court.



In the keystone of the arch was cut the Broken Bow, an old brand of the Cheyenne Indians, and back of the house, in the toe of the bend, stood the stables and corrals.

"Regular fort, isn't it?" said Gorham. "I haven't been here since the big fight, when we came down to explain things to the English, after we'd showed 'em nice and peaceful that we wasn't going to walk out and give 'em the upper country for a Summer range. Queer people. We'd smashed 'em flat and they knew it, but you'd 'a' thought from the way they acted that we was a bunch of tramps asking for a bite of grub. And for all they knew we was going to hang the last one of them.

"I'd heard that a mining man from Arizona had bought the place, but that didn't bother me any, because if we could lick the English, with Rivers back of them, we sure could lick a mining gent that didn't know anything about cows."

Dick Lloyd laughed.

"Looks as if the mining gent had made an awful strong play for a starter, Frank. If he can make it stick how are we going to get our beef to the railroad, let alone having no Winter range? You know there isn't half enough grass above that fence to winter the cattle on the upper Verde."

Gorham turned his horse down the trail.

"It looks bad, but no game is ever played out till the last card falls."

He turned in his saddle and grinned at the others amiably.

"Wonder if I dare talk to this Newton like I talked to his foreman."

Their arrival attracted no attention as they rode through the archway.

A bunch of saddled horses stood on the other side of the court, their heads together, lazily switching their tails. Half a dozen punchers sat cross-legged around a Navaho blanket spread in a shady spot, intent on a game of Mexican monte.

To their right, in front of what was evidently the quarters of the owner, was a covered porch, sheltered with sun-blinds and awnings, and furnished with couches, hammocks and easy chairs, and in one of these a girl sat reading.

Gorham gave a low whistle.

"I didn't know that Newton had a family," he whispered. "Leave your guns on your saddles, boys; no breaks, you know, when there's women around," and he unbuckled his belt and hung it over the saddle-horn.

As they approached the girl looked up and Gorham took off his hat, as did the others.

"Excuse me, miss," he said. "Is Mr. Newton anywhere around?"

The girl rose.

"My father is in his office, where you see that open door," she said, pointing. "Walk right in."

Newton, a stocky man nearing fifty, his hair tinged with gray, rose as the three entered. His smooth-shaven face was not unpleasing, but his eyes at once attracted attention. For they were the yellow eyes of the wolf, with a cold ferocity in their fixed glare which few men could meet without an involuntary shiver.

"How do you do, gentlemen," he said, "Will you sit down?"

But Gorham remained standing.

"Not just yet, thanks," he said. "We're here with a belt—and it isn't white," he added meaningly.

"Ah!" said Newton. "I think that I understand."

"Mr. Newton," went on Gorham, "I'm Frank Gorham of the Boot outfit on the upper Verde. We've just come down with a drive of beef and find that you have the desert trail fenced at the Sand Springs, and a bunch of gunmen there to hold the fence, so we dropped over to see what it means?"

Newton turned to a large map on the wall.

"Mr. Gorham," he explained, "if you will look at that map you will see that the government gave to the railroad, as a bonus for building, every other square mile, like the black squares on a checker-board, for twenty miles on each side of the line. I have bought the railroad lands, and I can run a a continuous fence, east or west, north or south, anywhere inside the railroad grant, and never go off my own land, so long as I keep on the section lines."

"But," objected Gorham, "if you can do that, you can stop any one from crossing the grant, or getting to the railroad, or from having any use of the other half of the lands, which belong to the government and are open range, free to all."

"Mr. Gorham," said Newton, "I have left the stage and freight road to the railroad open, as the law provides. Otherwise what you say seems to be the case."

Gorham put on his hat, as did the others.

"It's war, then?" he said quietly.

"It's whatever you people want to make it, Mr. Gorham. If you should find that the loss of the Winter range is going to make the cattle business unprofitable, you will find me willing to make an offer for your ranches and cattle, although the ranches are worth little or nothing if you have no Winter range."

He smiled grimly.

"Can't I offer you gentlemen something to eat before you go? It's a long ride to the Sand Springs."

But Gorham declined with thanks.

"The outfit is back at Grass Creek by this time, and the upper Verde cowmen ride good horses, as the Broken Bow has found out once before," he said. "So we'll say good day until the next time we meet."

ONCE outside the house Gorham took off his hat and tapped his head.

"Solid, perfectly solid," he remarked. "Here the railroad has been trying to sell these lands for twenty years at a dollar an acre on long time, and everybody laughs and says that they aren't worth a ——. And along comes this Newton man—I take off my hat to him even if he don't know anything about cows—grabs the whole shooting-match and likewise ties us up in a double diamond and pulls the cinch plenty tight. It don't make so much matter about the beef, we can take them over the Rainbow Pass to the other railroad. It's only a little longer drive and a rougher country.

"If we could get across the railroad we'd be all right; there's plenty of Winter range in the desert on the other side. But there's no grass along the stage road, and no water only at the station wells.

"You can't drift over a hundred thousand head of stock cattle seventy miles without grass, or water 'em out of a bucket. They'd go loco and bust through Newton's fence, which would be playing right into his hand, just what he wants. You were right, Dick, Newton's made an awful strong play for a starter. What do you think, Buck?"

Said Mr. Buckner Ewing, Jr.—

"Did you ever see such a pretty girl?"

Gorham snorted.

"Dick, did you hear this poor feeble-minded unfortunate? Here sits the girl's dad with three aces in sight and maybe another in the hole, all set to break us good and proper, and us with a busted straight and only one more card to fall.

"And this half-baked kid that can't speak to a girl without tying his tongue up in a hard knot and falling all over his feet, he says, 'Did you ever see such a pretty girl?' "

He finished in a high falsetto voice.

"Buck," he went on, "I sure love you like a son, and if it wasn't for spoiling the gun, which I'm apt to need, I'd bend it over your head, just for your own good, even if you can't dent a billiard ball with a six shooter."

But Buck minded him not a jot; his mind was full of pleasanter thoughts.

THE little town of Box Alder, the supply point for the upper Verde, lay at the end of the hundred-mile-long road which ran from Rocky Point on the railroad across the desert and on into the cow-country.

It was like many other settlements in the mountain cattle-land.

A half-dozen stores which sold anything and everything, a small hotel and three saloons. A livery stable with its stalls, and the big corral behind, always full of handsome horses, mainly with their manes roached and tails thinned and trimmed, the "town horses," of the cowmen and punchers, and the boys and girls of the ranches.

Another stable and corral which housed and held the stock of the four-horse Concord stages which made the run each day between Box Alder and the railroad at eight miles an hour, changing horses at the stations which stood ten or twelve miles apart.

And between the two stables an open space in which the freighters that drove the twenty-horse-string teams pulling the three big wagons coupled together, lead, swing and trail, which brought in supplies from the outside, parked their outfits.

A big public hall, and a blacksmith shop with an arrangement of ropes, pulleys, shackles and swinging timbers in which the wildest bronc that ever walked could be trussed up and shod with a reasonable amount of safety. A much easier way, though not so spectacular, as roping the animal by the front feet, piling it up in a heap out in the street, tying all four feet together, rolling it on its back and shoeing it in that attitude.

Likewise there were some houses in which people lived and a school-house for the children.

One day Buck Ewing's "pretty girl," Newton's daughter Kate, had ridden into town on some errand and was at the hotel. She was a slender little thing, very white and fair, with light, fluffy hair and a wistful, half-frightened expression, which was, indeed, the way she felt.

For she had just come to this wild, rough country from the sheltered life of a convent, and everything was new, strange, and startled and alarmed her.

Her mother had died when she was a little girl, and her father, ever busy with his desperate gambles for huge stakes, like the one he was now engaged in, had sent her to San Francisco, where the good sisters had loved and made much of the lonely child.

Of her father she knew very little, save that he was rich. No expense had been spared on her education, and as she grew older her checks were promptly honored by a great banking-house, so, that within the limits set by the nuns, anything that she wanted she had.

But when she came of age, with girlish visions of what she could be to a widowed and lonely man, she had insisted on coming to the Broken Bow, only to find that she and her father had nothing in common, that he had no time for her, and that she was the only woman on the ranch.

Not that every attention was not shown her, for Newton's instructions as to the deference to be paid his daughter had been brief and pointed.

More than that, her very helplessness appealed to the reckless men he had gathered for the work in hand, so that the most of them treated her as if she were a princess and they her devoted knights.

But at the great ranch, with its heavily armed riders always coming and going on unknown errands, its air of alert preparation for some expected danger, she was a very lonely and frightened little girl.

So that a ride into Box Alder, and dinner with Mrs. Morgan, the landlady of the hotel, was an event.

It could not be said that Mrs. Morgan was a lady of the clinging vine type.

More than one hilarious puncher, who had disturbed the sacred quiet of her dining-room by too loud and unseemly mirth, had felt the weight of her good right arm, and one obstreperous youth had been thrown bodily through a window; for she was gaunt and muscular, and ruled her domain with an iron hand.

But her heart was big and warm, and she took the motherless girl into it and petted her, and told her stories of the wild early days, when the first cowmen came into the country and held it against Indian war-parties and outlaw rustlers, and also against the big cattle companies which tried to run them out, and she was the only woman on the upper Verde.

This day they sat in Mrs. Morgan's room, which overlooked the street, and the girl's attention was attracted to two men coming up the sidewalk.

"Who are they?" she wanted to know. "They were at the ranch the other day to see my father."

Mrs. Morgan looked.

"The oldest one is Frank Gorham, Wild Frank," she said. "They say he's afraid of neither man nor devil and he killed many a man in the old days. But he's good-hearted for all that and has many friends. He's a leader among the cowmen; they all look to him and follow him. The other is young Ewing, Buck they call him, his name being Buckner.

"My dear," she went on, "I'm going to get that boy in while you're here. He's that scared of girls that it's pitiful. At the dances he'll always ask the married women, and when it's ladies choice the girls, a half-dozen of the imps at once, will make a sport of asking him to dance, and hang on to him, and tell him how much they love him, which is more than half true, and he'll blush, and stammer, and won't know whether he's standing on his head or his feet; and he's a good dancer, too.

"But maybe when he sees that scared little look you've always got he won't be so frightened?"

Despite the girl's protest she got up, but paused to stare out of the window.

"Will you look at that?" she exclaimed.

For Crawford had turned a corner and he and Gorham stood face to face.

Now Gorham had turned several glasses over his thumb that morning and was in high good humor.

"Buck," he said, "will you look who's here? As I'm a sinner it's the gentleman that fenced the trail."

He hooked his thumbs into his belt and stood leering at Crawford.

"Stranger," he remarked, "I've forgotten your name, which don't matter. But if you feel hostile about what I called you the other day, or what I'm liable to call you now, let's go out in the street and shoot it out."

He put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills.

"I'll bet you two to one, the size of your roll, that I plug you center the first shot and that you either miss or hit me around the edges, and Buck here will hold the stakes. Come on, be a sport," he urged; but Crawford was not to be trapped.

"The time hasn't come for a showdown yet," he replied, and turned away.

Gorham took the end of the big handkerchief around his neck and wiped his eyes.

"Ain't this getting to be a —— of a country?" he mourned. "As soon as I ever laid eyes on that guy I had a hunch that he ought to be killed and I've made fight talk at him twice and he won't bite. Come on, Buck, let's go drown our sorrows."

But just then Mrs. Morgan called to them from the hotel.

When she had made the exclamation the girl had jumped up.

"What is it?" she wanted to know.

"It's Gorham trying to pick a fight with your father's foreman. I'd heard that there was some trouble about the range; but then," she added, "there's always trouble on the range."

"But they're not quarreling; just talking," the girl objected.

"Child," said the older woman, "don't I know? More than once I've stood here and seen them shoot each other down. Men and boys that I knew. Maybe they'd have been in here, laughing and joking, and then them that hated each other would meet and out would come the guns.

"It's a wild, hard country and wild, hard men, but it isn't so bad as it used to be, thank God, what with the young people growing up and knowing each other so well.

"But it's all right now," she added, as Crawford turned away, and she went to the door.

"Frank," she said, "aren't you ashamed to try to start a fight right in front of my window, and me entertaining a young lady that isn't used to such things?"

Gorham took off his hat with a sweeping flourish and bowed low.

"You are entirely mistaken, Mrs. Morgan," he explained. "I was only trying to make a little bet with a gentleman, and Buck will back up what I say, won't you, Buck?" But Buck remained non-committal.

"Mrs. Morgan," Gorham went on, "when people get old, like you and me, they have to have a little excitement once in a while, just so they'll remember that they're alive."

But Mrs. Morgan turned from him in scorn.

"Buck," she said, "leave that drunken reprobate go his disgraceful ways and come on in, there's some one here I want you to see."

And so Buck Ewing met his pretty girl.

When he saw the timid little lady who rose to meet him, and the face that had been before his eyes for days, he forgot all about how afraid he was of girls, and only wanted to take her up in his arms and comfort her.

And it is quite likely that she read the thought in his eyes and that it didn't frighten her, for the world didn't seem half so lonely a place.

And so they laughed and talked, and Mrs. Morgan went away and they never noticed. And when Buck had gone and Kate was getting ready to go home Mrs. Morgan laughed and kissed her.

"Child," she said, "you've worked a miracle, and he's a good boy and a brave one. Frank Gorham is as proud of him as if he was his own son, and Frank knows men—none better."

III

IT WAS the custom on the Verde, during the slack time between shipping the beef and drifting the cattle to the Winter range, to hold a big celebration at Box Alder, a sort of frontier Harvest Home.

And in spite of the threat of ruin which hung over all, this year was to be no exception. In fact, it was to be bigger than ever, a defiant fling at fate.

For the lawyers had given their opinion that Newton's position was unassailable, except that long and costly litigation might open a way across the railroad grant.

But this would come too late.

For as the cowmen of the upper Verde had broken the Englishmen by holding the Summer range, so would Newton now break them by holding the grass which the cattle must have for Winter feed, on Newton's terms, or starve.

So at every ranch, large or small, preparations were being made; for the rivalry, especially between the large ranches, was intense as to which had the worst bucking horses, the best riders, ropers, or experts with rifle or six-shooter.

To have a horse which the men of no other outfit could ride was equal in point of honor to having a rider that could stay on top of, without pulling leather, the top bucker of the range.

The outlaw horses, which had waxed fat during a year of freedom on the range, were brought in and grain fed, exercised, hardened and trained, and their particular brand of devilment developed, with as much care as if they were boxers training for a championship fight.

A bronc may have a natural talent for pitching, but judicious encouragement will so bring it out that the animal becomes an animated cyclone when in action, and certainly gets as much fun out of a contest as does the rider, and very often a whole lot more.

Now, Buck Ewing was by far the best rider of the Square and Compass, but on this occasion he took no part, which resulted in the outfit getting badly licked.

For their hated rivals, the boys who rode horses with the Boot on the left shoulder, put one over on them with disastrous results to both their pride and their bankrolls, by bringing in a new bucker which they had discovered while breaking colts that Spring, and which they had deceitfully kept hidden at the horse-camp all Summer, where the animal's education was carefully attended to without any one getting a line on their devilish plan.

And this knowing brute, having originated in his own wicked head a combination of sunfish, and swap and double reverse pitching which was a peach, piled the Square and Compass rider all in a heap, likewise breaking an arm and a couple of ribs, thus rendering him totally unable to take any further part in the proceedings.

To make matters worse, the champion outlaw of the Square and Compass failed to pitch in his usual form, and the Boot rider, who had managed to stay on by the skin of his teeth, insultingly stood on his head in the saddle after the bronc quieted down, and in that position asked his crestfallen adversaries if that bench-legged skate was the best that they had in the bunch.

This double catastrophe having left the Square and Compass without cash enough to wad a shotgun, a delegation hunted up Buck and besought him, for the honor of the brand and the sake of their pockets, to come to the rescue.

But that youth, being otherwise engaged, took the delegates to one side, and having forcibly and profanely consigned them to the nethermost depths for bothering him, returned a flat refusal. The cause of this was a young lady apparently named Kitten—at least that is what he called her—who had asked him not to do anything dangerous because she couldn't bear to think of his getting hurt. And her wishes being more important than anything else in the world he basely deserted his comrades to their fate.

So the envoys, muttering dark threats of reprisal, returned to their fellows and mixed much medicine.

As a result of this, they pooled their remaining funds and entrusting them to one of their number, dispatched him to where a poker game was being played on a saddle-blanket spread on the ground.

Here the adventurer, first taking the precaution to ask if it was a gentlemen's game and being informed that it was not and that if he had any cash to lose to get in quick, managed, it being by now nearly dark, to slip certain cards from the discard under the edge of the blanket when no one was looking.

With the aid of these, properly inserted into his hand at the right moment, he won a big jack-pot, after which he played close to his chest until the game broke up, and returned with much needed supplies.

During the day it was quite apparent that young Mr. Ewing and the daughter of his tribal enemy were on very good terms indeed.

There being an armed truce between the opposing forces which neither party was as yet ready to break, many of the men from the Broken Bow were in for the celebration, and the sight of their employer's daughter in such company caused much comment, especially as she had ridden in with Crawford.

But Miss Newton had explained this very satisfactorily, to one person at least.

"Kitten," said her escort—you will observe that he had lost some of his fear of girls—"you look like a little ghost this morning. What is the matter?"

"It's Mr. Crawford, papa's foreman, you know. Lately he's tried to be attentive to me, and it scares me. It isn't what he says, it's the way he looks at me, as if he owned me. And he's cruel, I know, I can see it in his face.

"It isn't anything that I can go to papa about, and I'm afraid of him, too, I'm afraid of those awful eyes; did you ever notice them? Not that papa is bad to me, because he isn't; he just isn't anything, although he tells me that if I want anything to let him know, and if I want to go back to San Francisco that I can.

"But I don't want to, not now," and she smiled. "But I haven't another living relative, or any one but just you, and that's the reason that I don't want you to get hurt, one reason, anyway.

"And there's something else. You know that you don't want to go to the Broken Bow, and so when Mr. Crawford asked if he might ride in with me I couldn't very well refuse. And when he asked me for the first dance I couldn't refuse that, either, after coming in with him. So you mustn't be angry, and I'll give you most all the other dances, and you bring your friends, nice ones, and I'll give them the rest."

SO BUCK EWING went to the dance that evening in the big flag-bedecked hall with a very well-defined wish to punch Crawford's head—which wish was not at all diminished by the sight of his rival dancing with his lady-love.

When Crawford asked for more dances he found that he was too late. Even Frank Gorham asked for one, explaining that he was too old but would like to sit one out, and he told Kate about the "Pretty Girl," and entertained her with comical stories until she forgot the fear that the tales of his wild past had given her.

And Kate met Alice, Dick Lloyd's girl-wife, who divided her time between dancing and running to look at a small edition of herself that slumbered peacefully in an adjoining room, along with other small persons, and also in looking after another edition, a little larger, who gravely waltzed with partners twice as tall as herself, calmly accepted four separate invitations to supper from different admirers, and deserted them all to eat with "Uncle Frank," thus causing many bloodthirsty threats to be hurled at that much pleased gentleman by the rejected swains.

And Kate met big, good-natured Dick Lloyd, who was evidently very much loved by both big and little Alice, and many other persons who made her feel that they liked her very much, and never in any way showed her that she was the daughter of their bitterest enemy.

So that she forgot all her troubles and danced and had a glorious time.

And then Crawford, who had been solacing himself at the Diamond Flush, came in in a very ugly mood.

Walking up to Kate he said, roughly—

"I told your father that I'd see you home; get ready."

"But," the girl objected, "I'm not going home tonight; I'm going to stay with Mrs. Morgan and go home tomorrow."

Then Crawford did, what, sober, he would not have done.

"You're coming now," he snarled, and put his hand on her arm.

Kate shrank away with a little cry, and Buck Ewing, getting into action with amazing swiftness, landed a jolt on Crawford's jaw that sent him spinning, to bring up with a crash against the wall.

A dozen men were between them instantly, and Gorham put a hand on Buck's shoulder.

"Son," he said, "don't you know that it isn't the thing to start a fight when there's ladies around?"

Buck's face was white and his voice shook.

"He put his hand on her, —— him; I hope I've killed him," he said.

Gorham was mildly curious.

"Do you own the lady, that you are going to slaughter any one that touches her at a dance?"

But Buck was beyond sarcasm or reproof.

"She belongs to me, and if he ever touches her again I'll kill him," he said, and strange to say Miss Newton didn't object to this outrageous claim of ownership; but perhaps she didn't hear it.

The day after the celebration Newton sent for Crawford.

"What's this I hear about last night?" he wanted to know, and listened in silence to Crawford's halting explanation.

When the latter had finished Newton spoke:

"I'll pass this up just this once, partly because you were drunk, but if anything like it happens again it means your finish, understand. You're a handy man to have around, but there's others just as good. I'll play this game in my own way and attend to this affair to suit myself."

But from that moment Crawford began to play for his own hand. A few days after he had a talk with Andy Sawtelle.

Sawtelle, gunman and killer, but one who met men in front, listened silently, a sneer on his reckless face.

For his rightful name was one well-known in the nation's history; he was related by blood or marriage to half the great families of an Eastern State, and wicked and ruthless as he was, he still held some of the traditions of his class.

"So you want young Ewing planted?" he said when Crawford had finished. "Is this an order from Newton, or a private deal of your own after what happened the other night?"

"What difference does that make?"

"It makes a lot of difference, Crawford," Sawtelle went on. "Don't try to play me for a sucker; a blind man could see through your game. Son-in-law to Jim Newton, eh? Some jump that for a common waddie. You —— fool," he continued, "cut it out. You may be a wolf all right, a little one, but Jim Newton's a lobo, and he runs with the lobo pack. You know what happened to Jackson, well enough.

"He made his brags that he knew too much about them to ever be bothered, and the first break that he made they took him down to Arrapahoe and hanged him in public, all legal and proper, as a warning to the rest, and nobody paid any more attention to what he told than they would to a blatting sheep.

"And here's something else to put in your pipe. You're not deuce high with the girl, and the kid is the whole deck—any one can see that. And Newton knows it, and hasn't lifted a finger. How do you know what his game is? You've got your nerve, butting in, but you can count me out. Any time that I want to commit suicide there's lots easier ways than mixing up in one of Jim Newton's plays."

IV

ALICE LLOYD sat reading a story to little Alice, and listening for her husband, who was out on the range that day and had not got home by dark. It so happened that she was all alone on the ranch, all the other men being away.

At last she heard the tramping of a horse, but after the sound had stopped for some time and Dick did not come in she became alarmed, and taking a lamp, went out.

There stood her husband's horse, riderless, the bridle reins dragging.

Frightened, alone, at first she was dazed, but just then the little girl came running out to meet daddy.

"Allie," she said, "if mama puts you up on Banjo can you ride up to Uncle Frank's? Look, you can see the lights, and tell him to come down. Ride Banjo just as if he were your pony. I'm afraid that he wouldn't let all three of us get on, and mama doesn't want to leave you and the baby alone."

So a couple of Gorham's punchers, enjoying a game of cards after the rest had gone to bed, were startled by a faint tapping on the bunk-house door, and one of them opening it was confronted by a very frightened little girl.

"What the—why, it's Dick Lloyd's kid. What's the matter, baby?" and he picked her up.

"Banjo came home without daddy, and mama put me on, and it was dark, and I forgot that Banjo was higher than Bluebell, and I fell an awful ways and hurt my arm, and mama wants Uncle Frank," sobbed the child.

"Hustle the old man," said the puncher, but his comrade had already departed on the run.

Still holding little Alice he grabbed one of his sleeping mates by the arm and jerked him, bed-clothes and all, on to the floor.

"Do your sleeping tomorrow," he snapped at that wrathy individual, "and pull the rest of those loafers out; there's something wrong down at Dick's."

Gorham made a strange comment.

"Why in —— didn't I kill that coyote when I had a chance?" he said as he came into the bunk-house where the men were jerking on their clothes in haste.

"One of you fellows hook on to a buckboard and go get Mrs. Richardson and take her down to Dick's," he ordered.

"Bert, as soon as you get saddled light out for Carson's and tell him to come on the high jump and bring the Indian called the "Weasel" with him. Another one of you go and get Jean LaBrun; we're going to need some good trackers or I miss my guess.

"Don't cry, Allie, Uncle Frank will take you back to mama and we'll go get daddy right away. Rustle all the lanterns and we'll go down, fellows," he finished.

But at Lloyd's Gorham was cheerful and matter of fact.

"Nothing to worry about, girlie," he told Alice. "Horse most likely fell with Dick and busted a leg or something; we'll have him home and in bed in a hurry. I've sent for your mother so you'll have some help to fix Dick up, and she'll be here in a little while."

After following the back track of Lloyd's horse for half a mile in the soft soil—they were plainly visible even by moonlight—Gorham stopped and took his bearings.

"I've got an idea we're wasting time, boys," he said. "A couple of you keep on this trail, and if you find anything—which isn't likely—fire a signal and make a blaze. Fred, you go back and meet Carson and that bunch and tell them to cut across and hit the trail which comes off the head of Willow Creek to Ewing's and follow it up. Tell 'em to hit it below the timber. The rest of us will go over there and be ahead of you."

They found Dick Lloyd where Gorham

had reasoned they would, in a clump of timber through which the trail ran.

As soon as the flickering lanterns revealed the dark object Gorham stopped them.

"We'll wait for the others," he said. "We're not any of us in it at reading signs with Carson, or the Weasel, or Frenchy, and we don't want to muss up the tracks. I'll go and see if there's any life, but I know that there isn't."

Taking a lantern he went forward very carefully, walking in the center of the trail, bent over the body, and came back, treading exactly in his footsteps. To questioning looks he replied by throwing his hand out in the Indian sign for death.

When the men he had sent for came he spoke to Carson.

"Dick's dead," he said. "You three fellows take a good look before we pick him up. Cut some poles and make a *travoise*, boys, to take Dick home," he said to the others. "Take my horse; he's gentle. One of you go ahead and tell Mrs. Richardson, and then go on home and get me a fresh horse and throw a pack with some grub and coffee on to another, and come back, for we're going to camp on this trail 'till it ends. And another thing, boys," he added, "this may be an accident, so let it go that way. If it isn't it's better to let them that did it think we're fooled."

After the party had left Gorham spoke to Carson.

"Did you see anything, Jack?" and Carson nodded.

"Plenty," he said, and the Indian added three words—

"Better wait daylight."

"Dick's horse fell, rolled clear over, and Dick's head is mashed in," Carson went on. "But the trail is perfectly smooth there, nothing for the horse to fall over. And the horse lit on his left shoulder, and the place on Dick's head is on the right side, well back.

"Frank," he continued, "how did you figure it out so quick, that it wouldn't be an accident, and where to find Dick?"

"Well, it's like this," Gorham told him. "Buck Ewing had a run in with that straw boss of Newton's when neither of 'em had their guns on, and Crawford hasn't been hunting Buck, which isn't natural, because Crawford's a bad-man with a rep to keep up, and Buck's not a gunman like I am," and he smiled grimly. "So I told Buck to keep his eyes skinned and to stay off the skyline. Then today one of my boys was up on the head of Willow Creek and said that he met Dick and Buck up there, and Buck said he wasn't going home to night, was going over on the Cottonwood, and asked Dick to go around by the ranch and tell 'em where he'd gone.

"And after that the boy saw a couple of riders that acted as if they was trying to keep out of sight. They was so far off that he couldn't tell who they were, and he didn't go any closer, because it isn't always healthy projecting around after gents that's trying to keep under cover. I had it all figured out to take some of the boys and go up on Willow Creek tomorrow and trail those guys and see what they was up to. And the way I got it sized up is that they were laying for Buck and figured to get him going home, and got Dick instead. And by ——," he flamed out savagely, "I'll put a rope on those murderers and string 'em up if it's the last thing I ever do."

After a while he went on—

"So when I saw that Dick's horse had cut across from the trail to the Square and Compass, heading for home, I knew right away what had happened."

Meanwhile the Indian, having said all that he considered necessary, had staked out his horse, built a fire, rolled up in his saddle blanket and gone to sleep.

LaBrun now suggested the same thing.

"Perhaps a long trail tomorrow, a little sleep won't hurt," and the rest agreed.

BEFORE the sun was an hour high the next morning the trackers knew all that was necessary. Carson summed it up.

"They covered their trail good, but not good enough," he said. "It might have fooled some, especially if whoever found Dick had milled around a lot where Dick lay before they started to read sign.

"They had a rope across the trail between those trees, the mark is plain enough, about knee-high, and when Dick came along, riding easy, one of them cracked away at the horse with that rock.

The Weasel picked it up.

"The horse jumped, hit the rope and turned over. And before Dick knew where he was at one of them cracked him over the head.

"They either had on moccasins or had

pulled off their boots—you can't tell in the grass and leaves—but all that don't count, and it's up to the Weasel to back-track them to where they left their horses, and maybe we'll find out some more."

And the Weasel made good. Half a mile away the trailers found where two horses had been tied for several hours, but the most painstaking search revealed nothing but the half-burned stubs of two matches and a tiny scrap, torn from the end of a cigaret paper.

"Made themselves a smoke before they rode away, the cold-blooded curs," said Carson. "And that's where they fell down, or one of 'em did, because that piece of paper is just as good as a photograph. Of course it's a cinch that they're from the Broken Bow, on account of that row the other night. And when we get the guy that tore that cigaret paper we'll come pretty near finding out who ordered the job."

And so Dick became a memory to big and little Alice and to his friends, but to these last the memory was a living flame, and they waited and watched with tireless patience for time to deliver his slayers into their vengeful hands.

A RIDER pulled up a panting and lathered horse at Gorham's ranch one evening, and went hurriedly in.

"Frank," he said, "I reckon we've got our man. We've kept close cases on every one from the Broken Bow that's been in town for a month, seen 'em all, and he's the only one that smokes a short cigaret. It's a Mexican, fellow they call Pedro, and as near as we can find out he was one of Newton's men down south—did a lot of dirty work for him there. He's in town on a bat, so ain't likely to leave, and won't be allowed to anyway, for I put some of the boys wise. They wanted to hang him right away on general principles, but I told them what you said; so they are waiting for you."

An hour later Gorham walked into the long barroom of the Diamond Flush Saloon.

There were more men there than usual, and most of them were more heavily armed than was customary in town.

As Gorham came in the Mexican, Pedro, had just taken a drink, and stood near the bar.

Gorham walked directly up to him.

"Stick 'em up," he rasped. "You know what for."

The Mexican's hand flew to his gun, but quick as he was, Gorham was quicker. His left hand snapped on to the Mexican's right wrist like a steel trap, while with his right hand he pulled his gun and smashed it down on the head of the killer, who went down like a shot beef.

Gorham jammed his gun back in the scabbard and looked at the prostrate form.

"Throw a couple of buckets of water on the cur and he'll come to," he said. "I hit him a glancing blow on purpose, though it went against the grain. I'd sooner have split his head open."

A little later the Mexican stood in the log breaking corral back of the livery stable, in the center of which was a heavy snubbing post. He had refused to give the name of the man who had helped him commit the murder, and Gorham had ordered him taken there.

"I'll make him talk or skin him alive," he said savagely.

"Jerk off his shirt and tie his arms around that post," he now ordered, "and start a fire and rustle some irons; we'll try a little Indian treatment."

To remonstrance from some of the more humane ones he refused to listen.

"He don't deny that he was one of 'em, does he?" he said. "How much of a show did they give Dick? If you fellows are so chicken-hearted that you can't stand it, pull out, but he'll talk or go to —— on a blazing chariot, one or the other, —— quick."

But at the first touch of the red-hot iron the Mexican screamed and confessed:

"It was Anderson. He gave me fifty dollars to help. Yes, Anderson, the big man that wears two guns. Yes, a Broken Bow man; he's one of the wagon foremen."

But beyond that he claimed to know nothing.

Gorham admitted that this might be so.

"Put on his clothes, tie his hands behind him and take him to the livery stable office. A couple of you watch him, mighty close; there's no telling what he might do.

"Now that we're not doing anything unlawful we'll go wake up old man Hughes and get a warrant for Anderson, and a bunch of us'll go out to the Broken Bow and serve it, and then maybe we'll find out who's back of the whole thing."

But before this was accomplished, a fusillade of shots and the rush of a running horse brought every one on the run.

One of the men guarding the Mexican lay on the floor, shot through the lungs, the other, his right arm dangling, his smoking gun in his left hand, stood in the street, cursing himself most wholeheartedly for a fool, and his inability to shoot straight with his left hand still more so.

"He worked his hands loose some way and played sick; said that his head hurt where Frank belted him, and Bill got too close and the greaser grabbed his gun," he explained to wrathful inquiries. "You fellows needn't say anything, I can say it myself. And maybe Bill's got his, so he's out of it."

Gorham called half a dozen men by name.

"The fat's in the fire and cussing won't get it out. You boys string out and tell every man that ain't here to be at the Broken Bow as quick as the Lord will let him, and a whole lot sooner, and don't spare horse-meat while you're doing it; there's plenty more.

"The greaser'll head for there, to get a fresh horse and warn the others, but we'll be so close behind that he can't get away."

Where the road to the Broken Bow turned off Gorham stopped, swung off and lighted a match. The fresh horse-tracks went that way.

"We'll get him all right," he exulted. "He didn't have ten minutes start of us and we've been burning the ground. Throw a rope over that telephone wire and jerk it down; there'll be no getting word to Washington, and having the cavalry butting in this time."

There was no light or sound at the Broken Bow, and Gorham strung his men in a circle around the place. The quadrangular, fortress-like stone house, with its iron-barred windows, looked grim and formidable. The corrals and stables, set away from the house, seemed abandoned.

"We don't know just what sort of a play this is, and we might stir up a yellowjackets' nest," he remarked. "If you see any one trying to leave plug 'em first and inquire afterward, otherwise we'll wait for daylight and more men."

DAYLIGHT showed the gates in the archway closed. "That's a little out of the way, they're generally open," said one of the watchers. "And there should be somebody out at the corral by this time, these short days."

"It's up to us to make the first break, then. You come with me, Carson," and Gorham rode up to the gate and shouted.

After he had done this several times a little wicket in the gate opened and a man looked out.

"What are you yelling about this early?" he wanted to know.

"We want to see Newton; is he here?"

"Yes, but he isn't up yet."

"Go wake him up, then, and tell him Frank Gorham wants to see him."

Shortly afterward the gate opened and Newton came out.

"Good morning, Mr. Gorham," he said. "What is it you want?"

Gorham returned the salutation.

"We want two of your men, Anderson and Mexican Pete."

Newton expressed surprize. "What do you want them for?" he inquired.

"Murder," said Gorham shortly. "Are they here?"

"I don't know. I don't keep track of the men. I suppose that you have warrants?" Newton inquired.

"We don't want warrants, Mr. Newton," Gorham told him. "It's gone beyond warrants now. Those two men killed Dick Lloyd, and if they're here they're going to hang for it, right here, today."

"I'm not in the habit of giving up any of my men to any one that wants them," said Newton. "If you will send an officer with a warrant he can serve it if the men are here," and he turned back into the gate.

Gorham and Carson rode back to their men.

"It's a showdown," Gorham explained. "If we don't get those killers today we never will get them. If we're going broke over this play let's go broke right, though if any of you want to back out, I don't blame you."

But no one showed any desire to withdraw.

"Jack," said Gorham, "make a circle and see that every point's covered, and that plenty of men watch that little gate in the back that opens to the corrals, so that nobody makes a break to get away."

"But how are you going to get them out of there without half of us getting killed?" some one wanted to know.

"Son," said Gorham, "just you watch. I'd a whole lot rather take the job of getting them out of there than if they was holed up in a nest of log buildings, like Rivers' gang was."

He called two of his men.

"You fellows go back to town and get a lot of dynamite, fifteen or twenty boxes anyway, and caps and plenty of fuse. Hurry all you want to going in, but get a spring rig and drive back easy, and be careful of the caps; we need that powder a whole lot more than we need a hole in the ground and a couple of missing punchers. When you get back we'll blow in the gate for a starter."

"And you better bring all the rifle cartridges there are in town. We're liable to throw a lot of lead before we get through," he added.

"But," objected the young fellow who had questioned their ability to take the ranchhouse, "how in blazes is any one going to get close enough to blow in the gate?"

"It's two hundred yards from the nearest cover and they'll have a man at every window and fill anybody that tries it so full of holes that they'll look like a tin sieve. And we can't get at them; you can't shoot through a stone wall."

Buck Ewing also put in an oar.

"Here," he said, "you mustn't blow up the house; Kitty's in there."

"Kid," said Gorham to the first speaker, "keep your eyes open and you'll learn something. If we can't shoot through a stone wall neither can they.

"Buck, we all know you're in love and therefore more loco than usual, but your girl isn't going to get hurt. There's plenty of safe places, and her father'll look out for her.

"And unless I miss my guess, no matter what Newton wants, that gang isn't going to stick it out to a finish on account of the two we want, after they see we're in earnest. That kind doesn't hang together that well. Now we'll get ready to start things as soon as the powder gets here.

"Some of you fellows go around back and get a dozen or so logs, tear down a stable or corral if you have too, and cut 'em to about ten feet; that gate's twelve across. Load 'em on to a wagon and bring 'em around. Take it easy and keep out of sight in the brush; we've got plenty of time."

He studied a moment.

"Make it fifteen logs, about a foot through," he said, "and bring two wagons. Might as well hitch up a couple of teams—make Newton's horses help to smoke him out."

After the men had gone he had all his remaining men except the pickets gather in front.

"Now listen, everybody," he said. "This'll be the play, and you all want to know what you're doing, because when it starts we want to keep going without any break. Make that gang inside think the lid has blown off of —— and the boiling brimstone is right behind.

"What we want is the men that killed Dick, and the one that ordered the job, and if we throw a big enough scare into the bunch they're going to give 'em up to save their own hides.

"Everybody, except just enough to cover the other three sides, line up here in front. About four men take each window. The rest bunch in front of the gate. Take good cover, behind trees, or pile up rocks, and keep out of sight, though I don't think that they're anxious to start the little ball rolling.

"When we're ready, start slinging lead through the windows, so some of 'em won't get curious and go to looking out.

"Then we'll blow in the gate. When that's done, you fellows in front of it start pumping lead through good and lively, so's to keep 'em down. That's going to be the hard part, because they can see out and we can't see, on account of the smoke there'll be in the court.

"Now I want a dozen volunteers, because we're going into a hot place, and if anybody should happen to land a bullet in the giant dynamite before we get it ready we'll all climb the golden stair so fast we'll melt the steps. No married men; just some of you crazy kids.

"There's a little window in the archway, just inside the gate, on the left hand side; and there's where we'll get into the house.

"And everybody get this, and get it good: When we're in, after we've blown the gate, shoot high; there'll be plenty shooting low from the other side. Keep your eyes open, and when one of us waves a hat send everything you've got through in a hurry. Keep your magazines full for that, and when they're empty every one stop. Maybe that'll make those guys inside duck for a minute and give us a better chance."

He called for his storming party and picked the smallest men from those crowding forward.

"Nothing doing," he said to angry expostulations from the larger men. "It's a tight place, like I told you, and I want good little men, not good big ones."

The two wagons with the logs had by this time come around.

"Pile a lot of rocks on the wagons, all that'll stick," he ordered. "After we blow in the gate we're going to roll some of those logs into the passageway, and pile 'em up for a breastwork, to work behind. Two of you take your saddle ropes and stay on the right-hand side outside the gate, so we can snake the logs across. We'll take the wagons up from the left. After the gate goes keep out of line, because it's going to be an unhealthy place."

And to all he added—

"When you see us coming out of there, like a bat out of ——, get ready to duck, for if everything goes according to schedule there'll be a lot of stone coming this way in a hurry."

WHEN the dynamite arrived Gorham opened a case. Taking out a stick he unfolded the paper wrapping at one end, and made a hole in the soft giant with a pointed stick the size of a lead pencil. Cutting a foot of fuse, he slipped one of the innocent-appearing caps—which looked like a rimless, empty .22 cartridge shell but contained enough fulminate to blow a hand to bits—over one end and clinched it on with his teeth.

Pushing it into the hole, he pressed the giant back around the cap, wrapped the paper about the fuse and tied it firmly with a bit of string. He split the other end of the fuse so that it would light easily, laid the prepared stick down and fixed another in the same way, only with a yard of fuse.

This last he put back into the case, replaced the cover and wrapped the whole with many layers of raw-hide lariats.

Meanwhile others had prepared four more cases in the same manner, without the rope wraps.

"Put 'em on the wagons, boys, and one more with them," he ordered; "and some of you climb up to hold 'em on.

"Pass the word to begin shooting at the windows, and you fellows that's going with me take a long breath, because you won't have time after the ball starts."

He picked up the single stick of dynamite, and, as the rifles began to rattle and glass to fly, walked to the edge of the trees, looked intently along the line of the windows, and seeing no smoke from any of them, stepped into the open. No shots were fired at him.

He waved his hand.

"Come on," he yelled, and, wheeling, ran for the gate.

The two loaded wagons, with some of the men running alongside, followed him, and swung in close to the wall at the left of the arch.

"Turn the horses loose, and give 'em a start," said Gorham. "Put those four boxes with fuses against the wall."

Working rapidly, they piled ten of the logs over the four cases, Gorham placing the single stick of giant with them.

Then they put the other box at the bottom of the gate, with the wrapped bomb on top of it, and logs over all, with the stones wedged firmly against them, taking care that the fuse lay free. Also they turned the wagons bottom-side up on the pile.

One of them touched a lighted match to the fuse, and as it spit and began to smoke they ran to right and left and threw themselves flat at the base of the building.

The giant let go with a stunning crash, stones, logs and pieces of the wagons flying, and as the smoke drifted away jets of smoke began to spurt from the trees, sign that the gate was gone.

"Pass the logs up," Gorham shouted, and ran to the open arch.

The bullets of the sharpshooters among the trees were pouring through, buzzing like a swarm of angry bees, and already the besieged were answering them.

Many of their bullets, purposely aimed so, struck the top and sides of the passage, whistling and shrieking as the deflected lead glanced from the stone, filling the space with dust and flying fragments, while a fan-shaped area was marked with spurting jets of dust clear out to the trees, from which the bullets struck splinters of wood and bark, sent down showers of leaves and twigs from the branches, or buried themselves in the trunks.

The roar of the firing was such that even shouted words were hard to hear, but Gorham's men knew what they had to do.

The men on the right side tossed a rope across the gateway and a log was jerked cross-wise of the opening.

Throwing himself flat, Gorham wormed out behind the log, two others following him. Hugging the ground, they rolled the log in ahead of them, bullets thudding into it, or glancing from its upper edge, sending clouds of splinters whirling.

"What are you cussing at?" he yelled to the man next him, who was digging frantically at the back of his neck with one hand. "Keep her rolling."

"You can go plumb to ——," roared the one addressed. "A bullet nicked the top of the log and filled my neck full of splinters. I'd just as soon be shot as slapped by a porcupine, and this is a whole lot worse. I've got to cuss or bust, one of the two. Ouch!" he yelled, as a bullet grazed his upraised elbow. "Right on the funny bone. What made me ever leave home to be a puncher?"

Advancing behind the log past the little window, they stopped, wedging the end of the log against the left hand wall, and lay flat. The men behind rolled another log clear over them. They placed this alongside the first. Another came, to go on top of the others, and they were fairly safe.

Half-blinded with the stone grit, and choking with smoke and dust, they got the rest of the logs in and piled up four high. Then they scrambled out into the open again gasping for breath.

Gorham picked up the single stick of giant.

"Somebody wave his hat, and be all ready to pass the powder," he yelled and, crouching, ran back into the archway.

As the firing in front rose to a crashing roar he held his six-shooter against the window, pulled the trigger, and, lighting the fuse, tossed the giant through the shattered pane. The instant explosion blew out the sash.

The shooting in front stopped.

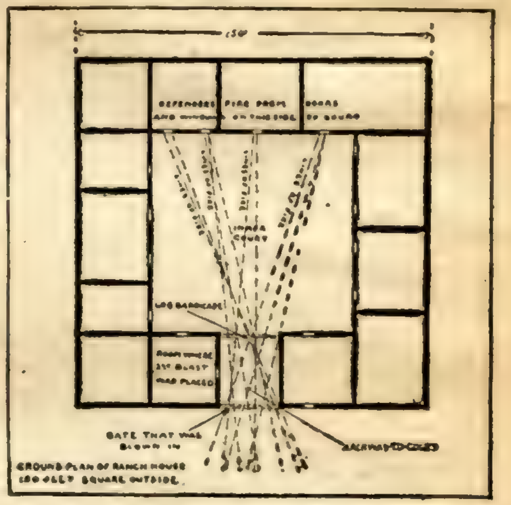
"Send 'em in," Gorham shouted, and as the others came running in, bent double, with the boxes, he lighted the fuses and they heaved the giant through the window. As the last one left their hands they started to run.

Hardly had the racing men gained shelter outside when the ground shook with a heavy jar and the walls and roof for fifty feet to the left of the gate heaved outward and upward, then disappeared in dense smoke shot with flame, through which fragments shot high into the air, or bombarded the sheltering trees.

When the smoke and dust settled they could see the havoc wrought.

A wide gap was opened into the court. The sides of the shattered walls sloped jaggedly upward, while twisted and hanging floors and splintered beams showed the awful force of the blast.

The court was filled with wreckage, some of which had been blown clear across, smashing doors and windows, while where flying stones had struck cracks appeared in the walls.


150'
DEFENDERS FIRE FROM DOORS AND WINDOWS ON THIS SIDE OF SQUARE
INNER COURT
LOG BARRICADE
ROOM WHERE 2ND BLAST WAS PLACED
GATE THAT WAS BLOWN IN
ARCHWAY TO COURT
GROUND PLAN OF RANCH HOUSE 150 FEET SQUARE OUTSIDE.

"Now," said Gorham, "maybe Newton'll listen to reason. Somebody that's got a white shirt tie it on a stick and wave it, and we'll have a peace talk."

For a while the white flag evoked no response; then an unarmed man appeared in the court, holding up his hands in the Indian peace sign, and making his way across the débris.

"That's Andy Sawtelle," said Gorham. "Things are getting warm when he comes out," and went to meet him.

"Hello, Sawtelle," he said.

"Same to you," was the answer. "Getting gay in your old age, aren't you?"

"A little. What have you got to say?"

"Have you got any more of that stuff?" Sawtelle wanted to know, jerking his head toward the ruins.

"Plenty. Want to see it?"

Sawtelle laughed.

"Your word's good with me, Frank; always was. You've got that bunch inside scared stiff," he went on. "Me, I'd give you another whirl, just for luck; so would Newton. But the others?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Newton can't handle 'em. They've got Anderson and Pete tied up, and sent me out to say you can have 'em if you'll let the rest go; none of 'em dared come themselves."

"Andy," said Gorham, "there's another man in there we want, but we don't know who it is, yet."

Sawtelle nodded.

"I know," he replied.

"Well, if you know, spit it out, and the sooner the rest of you hit the breeze the better we'll like it."

But Sawtelle shook his head.

"You know me better than that, Frank."

"—— it all, Andy," Gorham broke out, "you're not going to shield a man that would have another—a man with a wife and babies—killed like a dog, hit over the head in the dark with a club, are you?"

Sawtelle studied a while.

"I don't think it was Newton," he said at last.

"That's plenty. Go back and tell 'em to come out without their guns, and to bring Anderson and Pete with them."

"Newton and Crawford won't give up their guns, you know that."

"Tell 'em to come out with 'em on, then, but to come, or we'll blow the rest of the house to ——, and them with it," said Gorham savagely.

A little later the disarmed men of the Broken Bow stood grouped in front of the wrecked ranch-house, Newton and Crawford, still armed, a little to one side.

Gorham and his men faced them, the two doomed men in the front line.

Then Gorham stepped forward and spoke sharply—

"Crawford, we want you, too."

Crawford went white.

"I had nothing to do with it," he said.

Anderson looked at him with disgust.

"You —— liar," he snarled.

Newton whirled on Crawford.

"You cur! This is your work, is it?"

But Crawford was like a cornered rat. The smoke of two guns met and blended, and when it drifted upward Kate Newton was sole mistress of the Broken Bow.

FRANK GORHAM, in festive array, and vastly pleased with the world, stood in the Diamond Flush, his back to the bar, an empty glass in his hand.

"Fellows," he said, "isn't luck a —— of a thing? Here this Newton fixes up a play that looks unbeatable, and a girl, a little mouse of a girl, and his own daughter at that, knocks the whole thing sky-high, and she no more knowing what she was doing than a baby.

"Yes," he went on, "he holds three aces, and then the queen falls to Buck Ewing, who's likewise plumb innocent; which fills our hand, and Newton's game goes up in smoke, and him with it."

He turned around.

"Barkeep, set out another case; tonight's when a lot of Boot steers get swallowed whole. Fill up, boys, and I'll give the old-fashioned toast: 'Here's to the bride and groom.' "

The Camp-Fire

A Free to All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine, J. D. Newsom follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself. In spite of the rule against printing such things, I've gone and not cut out the last paragraph. Guess I haven't any good excuse to offer, except that so many of you do speak and think of it as "our" magazine that you are sort of entitled to hear some of the good wishes and compliments that come its way. I'm free to say I enjoy hearing them and sometimes I feel as if we in the office were sort of hogging them. On the other hand, we certainly won't turn Camp-Fire into a self-praise party.

Philadelphia.

An invitation to join the Camp-Fire can not be refused. It is a privilege to foregather with Men. Though I am a good listener, I find it difficult to talk about myself; so many others have gone farther and seen more; so many others are better qualified to talk. However, a newcomer should at least, for the sake of friendship, give a brief account of himself. Here's how:

I WAS born in China, and the weird stories of great dragons and strange gods which my *aya* whispered at twilight put a spell over me, a wanderlust for the waste places, the odd corners of the earth. In a measure I have satisfied my desire: Europe, North America, Australia, India, Egypt, and the less popular islands of the south Pacific where are no ukuleles and no goddesses with golden skin. I devoted four years and some odd months to the recent disturbance in Europe, sometime commander of a six-gun battery of field artillery, later, when the attentive enemy had mishandled certain outlying portions of my anatomy, an observer in a balloon section of the Flying Corps. An airman of the opposition (a very brave man) dropped out of the clouds and used a machine-gun with great precision on my gas-bag, wherefore my career as a sojer came to an abrupt end when the fields of northern France rose up to meet my swaying parachute.

THAT about covers the tale of my wanderings though I have not observed a faithful chronological order. This, however, can be of little importance. My interest in my fellow creatures made me take an interest in ethnology and allied sciences, and my two great hobbies are "readin' and writin'." I am aching to get to Lhasa before trolleys, electricity and enameled bathtubs are introduced there. My pet aversion is the young man with the college smile who has never strayed beyond the limits of his country club, who Winters in Florida, and wants to remodel the earth along the lines recommended by enthusiasts of the Fabian Society.

In conclusion, I want to wish *Adventure* all the success in the world. It has taken my breath away because of its spaciousness, its humanity and understanding—and such things are not commonplace in a "man-stifled town."—J. D. Newsom.

PROBABLY it's just as well that it isn't practicable to give you the letters to Camp-Fire in just the order they are received. Sort of adds interest to dig into our cache and draw out a letter a year or maybe two years old. Letters aren't printed in the order of interest, so sometimes the most interesting ones get held quite a while. I realize that when you send in a letter, particularly one of inquiry, you'd naturally like to have it reach the rest of the "bunch" as soon as possible. I can see a lot of ways in which our letters could be better handled. But when I try out these ways they somehow don't work out.

Anyhow, the element of luck in the draw adds to the interest. Sometimes I make a point of getting some letter in early for one reason or another, but that's because of something in the letter itself, not because some particular person wrote it. Have made one change in handling during the past year—instead of letting letters on one subject scatter promiscuously through many issues, we file them by subject now if any considerable number come in dealing with the same thing. Then we can have a fairly thorough back-and-forth talk on this one thing, or several talks, or scatter some of the letters for the sake of variety.

THE trouble 'way down beneath all the above is that there is such a whaling lot of letters in our cache, though I'm mighty glad that's true. Having three Camp-Fires a month instead of two helps to get more of our letters before you all, but, even so, we have plenty more. When we have something special on for discussion, like our expedition or our Stations, it not only slows up our use of the cache but it's mighty hard to find enough space for the special discussion.

Why don't I quit using up space myself, then? Well, I guess I'd better. I just wanted to explain things. As far as possible without boring you, I like to haul you over to my side of our editorial desk so you can sit in on both sides of the game. I happen to be the one of us who's editor and, from the necessities of the case, the editor has to decide a good many things without consulting all of you, but in so far as it can be managed I like to have you sit in with me or at least to let you know as much as you care to hear about what goes on on this side of the desk. In return, I expect you to help me keep in touch with your side of the desk by telling me your likes and dislikes, your questions and your kicks. If you don't kick decently, I'll kick back, but we in the office take decent kicking as a sign of friendly interest and a desire to help make the magazine better.

Now for a couple of letters out of the cache where they've been a year or so without hurting them any. They concern the name of a steamer in a story by R. T. M. Scott in the April 3, 1920, issue:

Florence, Arizona.

I wonder if Mr. Scott just happened on that name. I have sailed on the real *Baluchistan* from West Hartlepool, England, to the Baltic, from there *via* London to the east coast of Africa, Indias, and by Aden and Gibraltar back to Barry dock. The story is weird enough to have happened on the real *Baluchistan*. Rumor had it then that she had been used for running guns to the Mad Mullah, but our voyage was not very exciting. In Mombasa, Br. E. Africa, a bunch of our men were tried by the natives, also experienced a siege of the longshoremen on the forecastle head. The funniest part happened in Bombay. "Scotty" had bought a big monkey and had him tied on the forecastle head. We came along with our late Sunday breakfast. All went well until Scotty's monk felt hungry and felt attracted by the odors of our hash. To feel attracted was for him to covet, and to covet was for him to possess himself of our breakfast. A battle royal ensued, the monk was victorious and we went without our breakfast. This same monk made the return trip very interesting, indeed.

Would like to know if Mr. Scott is personally acquainted with this steamer.—R. S. Highfield.

Mr. Highfield's letter was forwarded to Mr. Scott, who replied:

New York City.

To be frank, I do not know whether or not I have ever sailed on a ship called *Baluchistan*. I have sailed on so many ships, large and small, in Indian waters that many of their names are drifting from me. Of course *Baluchistan* is an Indian name and, in selecting it, it just came to me with the thoughts I was thinking. If I ever actually sailed on the *Baluchistan* it was probably between Bombay and Karachi or between Calcutta and Rangoon.

WHAT you write about the monkey incident on board ship is very interesting. That monkey, in order to attack you and take away your breakfast, must have been very hungry, very vicious or very "spoiled." Perhaps it was a combination of all three. I kept monkeys in my bungalow compound for years in Ceylon and found them an intensely interesting study. I even went so far as to attempt to learn their language. I found that certain guttural chatterings and gurglings had certain definite meanings. Such feelings as hunger, pain, playfulness, anger and the desire to take a bath were definitely portrayed by certain sounds. After long practise I found that I could imitate these sounds and, to a considerable extent, arouse the corresponding feeling in the monkey.

AT ONE time a particularly vicious monkey was among my pets. This monkey would put his teeth into strangers whenever he had the chance. He hated the *chokra* and all native children with a hatred that was probably caused by frequent teasing. Imagine my surprise and alarm when my young son (just able to toddle a few steps) escaped from his *ayah* and, with an investigating idea, crawled out to where this monkey was chained. When I arrived the baby and the monkey were playing together as gently as two kittens while the native servants stood around afraid to do anything for fear the monkey might get alarmed and turn nasty. I believe I hurt that monkey's feelings when I took the baby away. At all events, he got in his bath and splashed water on everybody within reach. Did you ever see a monkey take a bath? But perhaps I had better close before you are tired of the subject. Yours for the Camp-Fire—R. T. M. SCOTT.

SOMETHING from Talbot Mundy concerning his story in this issue:

New York.

The first non-Moslem since crusaders' times to be allowed to enter the Mosque of Abraham at Hebron was King Edward the Seventh, then Prince of Wales; there came very near being an insurrection on account of it. The writer of this story and two friends were privileged to be the 18th, 19th and 20th respectively to pass the forbidden door.

The two "boys"—the Governor of Hebron, that is to say, and his assistant—are drawn from life. It was because the young man, whom I have named in this story de Crespigny, had made a tremendous impression on the Arabs by his courage, sheer ability and integrity that a word from him was sufficient to pass us into the mosque.

The details of the mosque, as given in the story, are about accurate, although given necessarily from memory because there are no printed particulars available in any guide-book or similar work of reference.

THE situation in Hebron at the time I was there was pretty much as given in the story, although I have run two or three tales together to make one connected yarn. I was in the Governorate when the mob arrived to storm it. We were all eating dinner (that was Easter, 1920), when the mob arrived to storm the place and the youngster I have called de Crespigny went out to talk to them.

Next day I was sent back to Jerusalem, in an open carriage with a lady and a boy. "De Crespigny" gave me a loaded revolver and advised me to use it at the least excuse, but nothing happened until we reached Jerusalem late that night and the bayonet of a British sentry thrust into the carriage from the shadow of the city wall took a button off my waistcoat.

AS FOR the "fire-gift," the trick of breathing fire and handling it is as old as the everlasting hills. The recipe given in the story for making a man fire-proof is, I believe, accurate; but I haven't tried it and don't intend to; whoever chooses to take a chance with it mustn't blame me. There is quite a number of different religious sects in the world, even to-day, and at least one Christian sect, who practise similiar trickery; one notorious fraternity in Jerusalem produce "sacred fire" and handle it before thousands of people once a year. Then there isn't a hotel in Egypt or the East where mountebanks don't swallow fire and pass the hat round. They most of them come to a horrible end, but I have seen one or two who are pretty handy at it, putting up at least as good a show as that described.

YOU already know something about the American Society, organized by former members of the old, original American Legion formed by our magazine and Camp-Fire in 1914-1915. Naturally Camp-Fire feels an interest in this new organization sprung from our old one and devoted solely to Americanism in its highest and broadest sense.

Personally I am very much interested in it, for it embodies many of the ideas I advocated in "Looking Ahead for Democracy." Before I joined the American Society I took issue with the clause that limited membership to citizens of native birth, for hosts of foreign-born citizens, during the war as well as in peace times, have proved themselves as good Americans as any whose forefathers lived in this country from the beginning. The practical answer I received from the Society was that, for the present, the difficulty and risk in trying to sift out the wholly Americanized foreign-born from the others was greater than the Society could assume. That seems sound.

ALSO, consider this. We have Italo-American, Polish-American, Irish-American, Anglo-American, German-American, Franco-American, Jap-American, Austro-American and a long list of other foreign American societies. Can anybody rise up and tell me that we are not also entitled to an American-American society?

We are not only entitled to one; we need one. If all other nationalities are to be permitted to organize in our country to keep alive the associations, language, customs and other things that tend to make them give at least a part of their allegiance or devotion to the foreign lands from which they or their fathers came, then all the more surely do we need an organization of native-born Americans to foster the associations, institutions and language that bind Americans to America and to counteract these other influences that to any degree divide the allegiance of any of our citizens to this country.

I AM particularly glad of the American Society's stand for free speech. Without free speech real democracy is impossible. Yet on every hand we see subtle pressure being brought to bear against it under this and that specious excuse. Free speech is the key, the very foundation, of our liberty and democracy. We can not afford to have it stolen or curtailed. And we shall lose it unless we organize to save it.

I do not believe in Bolshevism. I do not respect Soviet Russia, which has proved itself in practise as despotic as the despots it overthrew. But if any American citizen wants to preach Bolshevism here, let him preach it. If he wants Bolshevism instead of our present government, he has a right to express his view and to try to win others to it. So long as he advocates getting Bolshevism by lawful, democratic methods, let him talk. If we suppress him, we suppress something far more important than a Bolshevist.

Bolshevist Russia does not play a fair game. She resents any outside interference in Russian affairs, but she considers it all right for her to interfere in the affairs of other countries. But that is no reason for our suppressing free speech in this country founded on free speech.

WHEN it comes to letting non-citizens preach outside doctrines in our country I'm not so sure. World-brotherhood is all right, but it is folly to attempt this larger unit until we've shown ourselves more capable of real brotherhood in the smaller national units. A country's citizens support that country; I can see few rights or privileges for non-citizens who merely use the country, not giving it their support. It is like a man going into another man's house and insisting on teaching the other man's children what he, the house-owner and family-supporter, does not approve.

A nation is to be judged as a man is judged. If a man acted as Bolshevist Russia acts, I'd not respect him. Therefore, I can not respect Bolshevist Russia. Even if her theory is all right, she is not all right.

Nor can I respect the element in our own country who strive to repress free speech. Neither their motives or their brains. But we can not afford to underestimate either their power or their accomplishment. We need an American society.

THE watch-word of the American Society is "One country, one flag, one language." It seems humorous that Americans should have to argue for one language. More than one language in America is ludicrous. But we certainly have more than one.

Here, in part, is the prospectus of the American Society. Since a few of you misunderstood their attitude toward the present American Legion, let us first have a paragraph on that subject:

> With the present American Legion we have no quarrel. We sincerely extend them every wish for their well-being and success. Their object is a worthy one and their cause is just. But we feel that a greater ideal is in sight for fighting Americans than the objects they have in view. so we, the former members of the Chicago Division, send out the call to our "side-kicks," "pals," and "buddies" of '14 to join us in our work.

The prospectus follows:

> This is an aggressive, upstanding, forthright and loyal organization, of undiluted, unadulterated, simon-pure American men who have for their sole purpose the upbringing of forthcoming generations to a higher level of American progress and advancement. At the same time this organization constitutes itself the first line of defense in war and peace, and will be vigilant and unswerving in the protection of American womanhood, American childhood, American manhood.
>
> ### OUR OBJECT
>
> IN PUBLIC, not in secret; in the light, not in the dark; the American Society seeks to perform its function, fulfill its mission, and accomplish the upbuilding of the Republic.
>
> The insidious forces, the sinister and subterranean enemies of our country's weal, that seek to

undermine the Republic are the forces that it is the avowed purpose of the American Society to combat and vanquish, to sweep out of the nation; and to sound those larger notes of constitutional liberty which the mongrel, the unfit, and the undesirable can never benefit by.

By a system of education we purpose through our organization to acquaint every American with his daily duty to our country; we purpose with organized effort to exert an active influence for the betterment of politics and control of public affairs; we purpose through concerted action to produce throughout the land the adoption of a united course of physical training for the youth of our land; we purpose to have organized in every city, town and hamlet, an organization taking active interest in their town and country's betterment, we purpose by convention, literature, and local public gatherings, to solve among ourselves our country's problems—unemployment, housing, outrageous profit, food control, immigration, etc.

We recognize the American right assured every child of "Old Glory" of religious freedom, free speech, and public assembly. Our goal is a better land, a fit habitation for the salt of God's Kingdom, a place where man is truly man's brother and where an injury to one is justly an injury to all.

WHO MAY JOIN

EVERY male citizen of native birth in the United States, of clean and moral character, regardless of class or creed, who is willing to sign our obligation and diligently to exert himself to the furtherance of our objects, will be a welcome addition to our ranks.

HOW YOU MAY JOIN

FOR THE present, we have but our National, Headquarters. The membership now being enrolled are entered as national members. Later we will perfect our plan of State organization. Our charter is now in process of application. When this charter is granted, local charters will be issued to communities where we have enrolled a certain number of national members. These local chapters will carry on our work.

Our National dues are one dollar per year. Upon signing our obligation and returning it to our National Headquarters with one dollar your application will be acted upon by our Chicago Chapter, and if found acceptable you will be enrolled as a national charter member of the American Society. A membership card for the year 1922 and a gold-filled enameled button bearing the symbol of our organization will be mailed to you. Our symbol is the Star and Circle adopted by the former American Legion. If you are a red-blooded, two-fisted American of native birth we urge you to send your application for enrollment at once. We can promise you the association of real American manhood; men who in the past have proved their fighting ability and faith in their efforts to promote and defend the traditions and standards of Americanism.

OUR OBLIGATION

I, ..., of good moral character, born at ...., in the year of ...., hereby tender my application for affiliation in the American Society. I solemnly pledge myself to at all times uphold the Constitution of the United States, to take an active interest in promoting the welfare of our country; to participate in all local and general elections; to wherever possible, in my daily, social and business life watch over the well-being of my fellow Americans; to support any movement that will tend to promote the physical and mental betterment of the youth of our land, and to daily lead such a social and business life that the American Society shall have no cause to ever feel shame in calling me a member. To all of which I pledge my solemn and sacred honor.

We urge every virile and decent native-born American to enroll himself in the ranks of the American Society.

FREDERIC T. O. WOOD, M. E.,
National President.

James L. Renshaw,
First Lieut., F. A. R. C., U. S. A.
National Secretary-Treasurer.
1238 N. Clark St.,
Chicago.

SOMETHING from Charles V. Fischer in connection with his story in this issue:

Newark, New Jersey.

Farallone Island, the largest of a group of rocks that lie thirty miles west of the Golden Gate, is the place I mean by "Fog Rock."

This might be of interest. I was once stationed on that rock and, along with another "brass pounder," had an experience similar to that of *Goat* and *Graveyard* in the story. We went out fishing one morning and suddenly found ourselves making knots toward Honolulu, without either one of us at the oars. A physical affliction kept the other fellow from rowing. Hence I had to man the oars without relief. I pulled for about two hours without getting an inch nearer to the rock. Then the fog covered us. We anchored. Lay out there twenty-four hours before the gang found us.

Blackie is the same character I had in "Up the Pole." This story is therefore a sequel to that one.—CHAS. V. FISCHER.

FIRST of all, this is no precedent. There would be no room for anything else in "Camp-Fire" if we opened it regularly to letters of this kind. "A. A." is the answer for practically all cases of this kind, but once in a while out of good comradeship we can take a chance on a case some of whose queries are too specialized to be entirely covered by "A. A." Please note that no men are wanted for this expedition.

Denver, Colorado.

I would sure appreciate your publishing part of this letter in "Camp-Fire" as soon as you conveniently can, in hopes that some of your readers may have attempted something like a friend and myself are going to attempt next year and will be able to give us good advice. Our scheme may not be at all practical, and if that be so, then we can find out about it, before we blow in too much money on equipment.

My chum has written Mr. Young and Mr. Whiteaker and they both have given us considerable information, but naturally could not give any specific advice about an expedition.

OUR plan is this. To take a Ford down through Mexico from El Paso or Laredo through Monterey, Saltillo, Vera Cruz, Jalapa, the City, and on South, into Guatemala and Salvador if it proves practicable, although I understand the roads are mighty punk in the latter two countries.

It would be necessary for us to earn our way, and in addition a small amount of money over our expenses wouldn't be sneezed at. Our idea is something like this. To take along a couple of one-a-minute cameras, one making a picture on a pin and the other on a post-card, to sell to the peon trade, as well as a real camera and enlarging outfit for the better class trade. And, of course, a small photographer's tent.

IN ADDITION, we have been considering a portable motion-picture projector and a few films retitled in Spanish. Only we can't decide what is most likely to appeal to the Mexican mind. I have considered one or two old-time bloody melodramas, but, as my total experience in Mexico lasted only three months, I am no authority. In this connection, we planned on finding houses large enough to accommodate a moderate sized crowd in each town. The owner of the premises would of course be admitted free. It would scarcely be practicable to take along a canvas big top. Or then again we thought it might be possible to obtain a fixed amount of money by general collection or something of the sort and hold an out-of-doors show against the side of some house.

And perhaps some one of the Camp-Fire could tell us if there is any demand for travelog pictures of Mexico. If we succeed in getting into Guatemala it is our intention to visit the ruins of the old Indian cities there, which I don't recall ever seeing on the screen. If there is a market, a motion-picture camera wouldn't take up much more room.

LASTLY, we conceived the idea of a line of cheap jewelry. and am I right in thinking masculine jewelry would be best? I never knew a peon to buy his wife any luxuries, although I am no authority on things Mexican. Also, perhaps, a line of some sort of patent medicine. Certainly it would be as efficacious as the prayers of the priests!

Now please don't get the idea that we roam this fair United States selling rattlesnake oil or Cleopatra's liniment or something of the sort. This trip is a lark, pure and simple, but as I said money is also an object.

If any one should happen to have had experience along the above lines, they could write me either direct, at the address below, or in Camp-Fire so that all could get some value from it.

In the meantime, good-night, and thanks for listening to me for so long. Mizpah!—ROBT. B. CHESTER, 821 Twelfth St.

WITH his first story in our magazine—his first in any magazine, for that matter—William Wells follows our Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself. As an old-timer of the West, we extend to him a special greeting.

What he says about the Pony Express was called forth by one of our little articles that appeared some time ago.

San Francisco, California.

To my New Comrades: Following your pleasant and wholesome custom when a new teller of tales joins your circle, I step forward into the light.

IT IS not my first camp-fire, I have sat by very, very many, scattered along tens of thousands of miles of trail. But it may be my last, for my sixtieth birthday is close, and when one has come that far he knows that ahead, it may be a few steps or perhaps a long journey, is the spot where the trail turns Westward and crosses the Divide.

But I hope to sit many years yet by your Camp-Fire and if, when from time to time my turn comes to furnish entertainment, I have something new to tell you and can tell it in a way that will give you pleasure, I shall be very glad.

MY STORIES will be largely of the old West which I knew very well. As a boy I saw the plains when there were still buffalo and wild horses, when Indians war-parties still raided, when the endless strings of long-horned cattle came up out of the south and the wild cattle-towns were in their glory.

Then the mountains with the big game and the mining camps, the building of the railroads, the savage and bloody range-wars, and the days of the outlaw bands.

I have seen and taken part in many happenings, some amusing, some interesting and exciting, some dark and terrible.

And I have heard of many others from the lips of the actors therein, some of them men who had ridden with Frémont and Carson, with Bonneville and Ashley, and who had known men who had traveled with Lewis and Clark and with the Astor party. For, as time is counted, our West is very young.

IT MAY be that in the future some of my stories will deal with the sea, for I am here in San Francisco, which is still the Golden City of Romance, and those who travel its byways and sit in it meeting-places hear tales well worth the telling.

And what little special knowledge I may have is freely at the service of you all, through the pages of *Adventure*.

Oakland, California.

Although the story in this issue is pure fiction, the Broken Bow never was a white man's brand, and the Boot and the Square and Compass were Colorado brands of the old days, it might interest you to know that the sheepmen of the Red Desert in Wyoming whipped the cattle men of the upper Green River—the scene of the story is laid there—by getting hold of the railroad lands in the manner described. Only they didn't fence them; they ran a furrow a hundred miles long and posted the railroad grant as private property. Under the Wyoming law a land owner must fence against stock running at large on the open range but not against a trail herd, and the courts had ruled that stock moved from one range to another, or across a county line were trail herds. And there you were. It hit the cowmen an awful jolt.

Uncle Sam has been good enough to name the main head of the Green River, the one that comes out of the big glacier, after me.

THE following is a little dope on the Pony Express which I have dug up. I was told to-day that among the records of the Wells Fargo Express Company in San Francisco were those of the Pony Express and that it could be arranged for me to take notes from them if I wished.

The stations were at first 25 miles apart (Mr. Brininstool was right there) but the distance was found to be too great, and the number was increased as fast as possible until there were 190 of them, about ten miles apart, and the time was reduced to eight days, about ten miles an hour, as the mail went forward day and night.

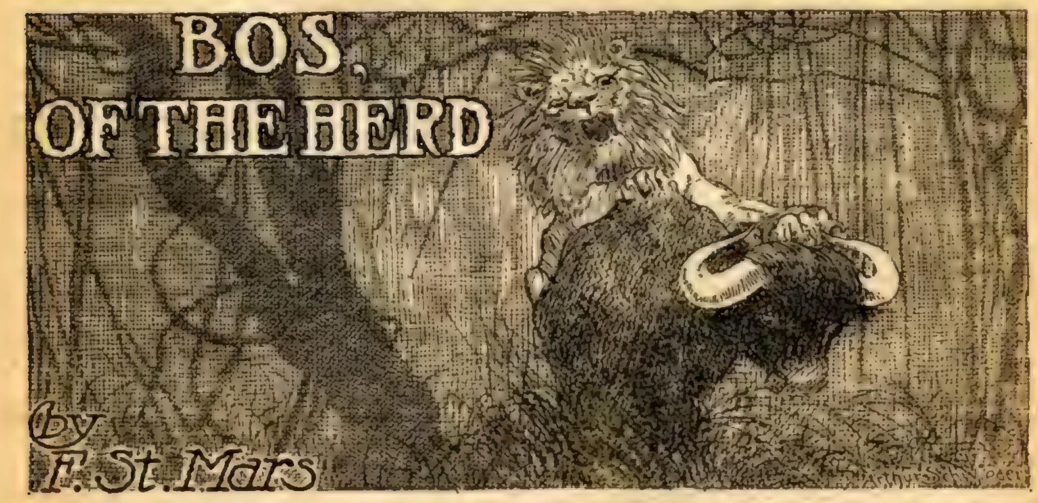
My information is that the riders had divisions of 75 miles each. Mr. Brininstool says 140, but my experience leads me to believe that no man could stand 14 hours a day in the saddle at that speed for any length of time.

If I am allowed to see the records I can of course get the true facts.

HOWEVER, my main criticism was about the speed, and Mr. Brininstool contradicts himself, as he says 20 to 25 miles an hour, and 250 a day, the latter being about right. Perhaps Mr. Brininstool thought that the riders only rode during union hours.

As to the speed the following has some bearing on the subject:

The fastest one, two and three miles ever run on the English turf up to 1910 were as follows: One mile, 1 min., 33 1-5 sec.; Two miles, 3 min., 19 sec.; Three miles, 5 min., 9 sec. These were separate races at these distances, not a continuous race. Note the decrease in speed as the distance lengthens. —WM. WELLS.



IN THE heading for F. St. Mars' story of an African buffalo a few issues ago appeared an American bison instead of an African buffalo. Happened this way. We caught the mistake in the office; but not until the plate had been made. We got the artist to change the drawing and had a new plate made. Pasted proof of right plate into "dummy" and sent it to composing-room. They put in the wrong plate. We failed to catch their mistake when final page-proofs came down. It was our job to catch it.

We're sorry, but we'd like to plead that at least we knew that bison and African buffalo are not the same bird.

Probably many of you noted the mistake and several of you wrote in about it. In replying I enclosed a proof of the correct cut, by way of an Exhibit A. Here's the last part of one of the letters, with a comradely offer at the end of it:

Dallas, Texas.

. . . . . showing all the sense and ferocity of the African Buffalo, which is the most dangerous of any present day animal and bears no resembalance to the Bison.

I have shot several African Buffaloes and know a little bit about them, they are very bad actors and I would much rather be charged by a Lion than one of them.

I DO not claim to be much of an adventurer but I have hunted for a year in British East Africa and managed to shoot several of the most interesting animals and got some very fine specimans of the big game, I have also visited nearly every town in Europe, hunted in India, Australia, etc., was in Singapore during a mutiny of the Indian troops there, also a mutiny on a French steamer, and have traveled to the borders of Tibet, been through China, Japan, Cochin China, Java, Siberia, Egypt, the Holy Land and quite a few other places, but I have never visited South America, Mexico being my nearest point.

So you see I have been able to keep pretty close track of some of your authors but mistakes are really very rare in *Adventure*.

I would be glad to hear from anybody wishing any dope on any of the above places.—P. MACKENZIE.

BE MARKING down your favorite stories as you go along and at the end of the year send us the names of the twenty you consider the best. We are anxious to print the sort of fiction you like, and the only way we can find out what that sort is, is for you to tell us. The list of the ten stories chosen as best by this annual vote of our readers will be published as soon as the vote can be compiled, with an honor roll of the ten stories receiving the next highest vote. The result of the balloting on the stories published in the 1921 issues will be printed in an early Camp-Fire. Be starting on your 1922 list in the meantime. Any one can vote.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Robert Simpson arises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. He talked so little in his first letter that I asked whether he wouldn't add to it, so the following (as in the case of William Wells) is really two letters joined together:

New York City.

Like a lot of other indifferent speakers, I don't know where to start or where to go to after I have started. I went out to West Africa because an opportunity to go to Rhodesia collapsed after it was all settled. My friends expected me to go somewhere that would give them an excuse to have a party. In fact it was already "on," presentation and everything. Two days after the Rhodesian thing fell through, I got the West African offer. So the party came off after all. People I hadn't seen in years were there. Just like a funeral. And that's what most of 'em thought it was. They knew the West African Coast by its more popular name of the White Man's Grave, and the thought of it gave them a wonderful opportunity to be sad.

A Scotchman and his wife love to be sad. They always look at the death notices first. And I don't think I was quite so popular when I got back. Anyway, as old Doc Kernochan told me, I didn't have sense enough to die, and this letter is one of the results.

If you'll tell me what to say, I'll be glad to say it but whenever anybody calls me an adventurer, I feel like a fake, and that's the honest-to-Gawd about that.

I DON'T know of anything I could add except that I landed in West Africa as, so it's said, William the Conqueror landed in England—on my hands and knees, and darned near broke a wrist doing it, too.

Jumping from the rope ladder of the *Mayumba* on to Miller Brothers' wharf at Warri, I stepped on a loose plank and spread myself out on the landscape to the intense enjoyment of the surrounding natives, who said I'd be desperately unlucky because of it. Aside from various other examples of the reverse being the case, I'll just mention the fact that the wharf that tripped me up was smashed by a cargo boat that leaned too heavily against it, and the *Mayumba* from which I jumped when the thing happened was rammed by her sister ship the *Monrovia* at Burutu a few months later.

I had the job of putting up the new wharf; that is, the Kroo-boys did the work while I stood around looking white and anxious. But my greatest achievement on the Coast was a concrete breakwater or river wall. I didn't know anything about concrete or foundations or tides or Niger mud or anything like that when I began. And I don't know anything about 'em now—except the mud. I know all about that—all. Anyway, the breakwater grew and stretched and stayed put. As far as I know it is still there, an enduring monument to the greatest gang of Kroo-boys and the most versatile Accra carpenter on the West Coast. Didn't *Tom Sawyer* get a lot of credit and apples and things for whitewashing a fence something after the same fashion? What I got out of it principally was mud.—ROBERT SIMPSON.

IS THERE anything in this idea? Suppose one of you happens to be in South America, picks up a copy, say, of the *West Coast Leader*, reads it, wraps it up and mails it to one of our Camp-Fire Stations in the U. S. or Canada and goes on his way. It reaches the Station and is kept there for the benefit of any comrade who come along. Well, you know how interesting it is to run across a newspaper from some foreign country you've maybe lived in, or at least visited—or even a foreign country you hope to visit.

And suppose another of you wanders into Shanghai and after reading a copy of the *China Press* mails it to some Station somewhere. And another comrade does the same by the Bulawayo *Chronicle* and another in India mails back the Rangoon *Times* (of which, by the way, the editor is Major W. Robert Foran, an old Camp-Fire comrade and member of our writers' brigade). Well, if the wanderers sort of got the habit of occasionally sending foreign papers, particularly those printed in English, to this, that or the other Station, gradually the Stations would accumulate an interesting and useful "library."

AND the stay-at-home comrades could reciprocate by mailing occasional U. S. and Canadian papers to Stations in foreign countries. Are home papers welcomed in foreign lands, even if they are a few weeks or even a few months out of date? *Are* they?

Best of all, it would add still more to the spirit of comradeship among us, this giving and receiving, this kindly thought for the other fellow.

Perhaps some of you will think of other things that might be interesting or useful to comrades that drop in at the various Stations. Nothing of any appreciable intrinic value, but any odds and ends that you yourself might welcome if you were at the other end of the line.

SOME of you get so —— lonely sometimes in foreign parts that you get an itch for writing to somebody, anybody, just for the sake of a handshake, as you might say, or just to link up a bit with "back home." I know you do, because sometimes comrades I've mever met write to me for that reason and no other. I've never failed to say hello back again, and I've an idea most of the Station Keepers would be as glad as I to greet a comrade who wanted to chin a minute. Of course the Keepers don't have to answer, but I've a hunch they'd do it. They're that kind—or they wouldn't be Keepers.

Little things like these build up comradeship. God knows this old world never needed comradeship any more than it needs it right now.

WHEN it comes right down to it, the best thing our Camp-Fire does is to build up comradeship among us. Here we are, probably at least a million of us, scattered all over the earth, of all kinds and degrees, poor and rich, Democrats, Republicans, Socialists, and Reds, capitalists, laborers and middle class, Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Heaven knows how many other religions, preachers and convicts, anemic clerks and hardy adventurers—all kinds and conditions of men. And we all have a common interest—luckily a clean, wholesome, manly interest—to bring us together. The splendid thing is that, after being brought together, we have gradually developed something more than a common interest. We've found we're all just humans after all and, being humans, there's friendliness in us, friendliness that would sort of like to speak out if we'd let it, and little by little, through ten years, we've been letting it speak out a little more and a little more.

The result is a feeling of comradeship and brotherhood that has grown until sometimes I'm amazed—and sort of humble—at the size and strength of it among so many men so scattered over the map and bound together only by ties that seem on the surface to be too light and thin for serious consideration. No, I'm not talking "oratory." Some of you'll think I'm making it out bigger than it is, but the reason I'm talking about it at all is that more and more of late I'm being surprized to find it's bigger than I'd thought it was.

THERE'S a significant thing—"of late." Haven't you begun to notice that the world is getting sort of hungry for friendliness and good feeling after all the wars and turmoil and in spite of the wars and turmoil still going on? We're just humans, you know, and at bottom humans are friendly critters on the whole. And we're been in a rotten bad temper and fought and snarled and suffered and now we're getting tired of all that and want to be friendly. Haven't you noticed it? The world's still full of riot and unrest, but haven't you noticed this other thing beginning to rise up, this desire for friendliness again? If you haven't, hold your ear a little closer to the ground.

And our Camp-Fire is doing its little part. Maybe most of us don't notice it until we stop to take a careful look and think it over, but we're doing our little part in the good work and doing it all the better and more effectively because we are under no *obligation* to do it, because we're all of us free agents and can do as we blamed well please and don't have any rules or regulation dangled in front of our eyes, when we gather around Camp-Fire. We gather there because we know we'll find there men who have come to talk about the decent, clean things of outdoors, who come in friendly spirit. We lay aside our hostilities and our greeds and hates and selfishness and sit down to take it easy with friends. The rest does itself. No one of you *has* to do anything for any other comrade, but somehow he gets sort of willing to. Each one gains, too, from our meetings, in understanding of other places, other customs, and of the other fellow—broadens out in his sympathies as well as his mind. And there you have it—the germ of comradeship and brotherhood.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders, of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange*, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.

WILL BUY: All of 1918, 1919 or 1920. State price before sending.—Address FERDINAND SCHROEDER, R. I. Palms, Mich.

WILL SELL First Jan., 1920 to Dec. 30th, 1921, inclusive. Forty-seven copies in excellent condition for $4.50 post-paid.—Address W. J. EMRICH, 316 5th St., Union Hill, N. J.

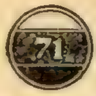
Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations



Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Assn. of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelop is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
Beriah Brown, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2
Captain A. E. Dingle, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
Captain A. E. Dingle, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
Charles Brown, Jr., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
Albert Goldie, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
Fay-Cooper Cole, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
Dr. Albert Buell Lewis, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
Buck Connor, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 103 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
Captain Beverley Giddings, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Africa Part 1
Thomas S. Miller, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

14. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment; trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

★ (Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)

15. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

16. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

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George E. Holt, Frederick, Md. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

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J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

21. Balkans
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Albania, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, language, customs, trade opportunities.

22. South America. Part 1
Edgar Young, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America. Part 2
P. H. Goldsmith, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil (except Pará and Amazonas), Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. South America Part 3
Algot Lange, care *Adventure*. Pará and Amazonas, Brazil. Topography, customs, hunting, fishing, agriculture, lumber, industry, climate and health.

25. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, 90 S. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

26. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

27. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

28. ✠ Canada Part 1
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

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Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

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George L. Catton, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

31. Canada Part 4
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

32. Canada Part 5
Ed. L. Carson, La Connor, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

33. ✠ Canada Part 6
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manoitba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

34. ✠ Canada Part 7
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

35. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

36. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

37. Western U. S. Part 2
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

38. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

39. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
John B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Siuox City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

40. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

41. Eastern U. S. Part 1
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, automobile, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

42. Eastern U. S. Part 2
Howard A. Shannon, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat and canoe cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and tributary rivers. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

43. Eastern U. S. Part 3
Hapsburg Liebe, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

44. Eastern U. S. Part 4
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 79 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out of doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and advice; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

Pirate Literature

THIS question fell entirely outside the field that Mr. Barker marked out for himself in "Ask Adventure"—namely, ancient weapons, and firearms prior to 1800. But it so happens that Mr. Barker is an authority on pirates, and the question gave him an opportunity of sharing his knowledge with "A. A." readers. For that reason he replied to the inquirer at length; and for that reason also we are publishing the correspondence:

Question:—"Could you give me a list of great pirates' names and what they did? Could you tell me if there is any hidden treasure in the Cocos Islands? Along what coast did most of the pirates lay for ships? Do you know where I could get any literature on lost treasure or about pirates of the olden days? In what years did the pirates get captured? When was this stopped, in what year? I mean piracy."—JOSEPH M. KOCKA, Clairton, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—I am sorry to have to ask you again to look at the conditions under which the magazine purports to answer questions. It says—

"1. Service free to anybody, provided *stamped and addressed envelop is enclosed.*"

Not a postage stamp. I am glad to answer your letter, but it would be well another time to try to comply with the conditions, as some one else might not answer you. You surely must realize that it would be impossible to answer your queries short of a book. In fact, you should read several books.

I am at a loss to understand just why you thought that I would answer questions on pirates and buried treasure. I am supposed to answer questions about edged weapons and old firearms.

However, it so happens that I lecture on pirates as well as on firearms, and will be pleased to answer such queries as can be answered briefly, and to refer you to a list of books on the subject. I am enclosing one of my lecture circulars, as it will give you some information relative to pirates, and a cut from a very old pirate book, published in London in 1726.

I wish to state right here that the magazine *Adventure* has published a great many stories by J. Allan Dunn and by Rafael Sabatini, concerning pirates, which are taken from real history, and from which you should get a very good idea of them.

Naturally I have not space to go into hidden treasure. There probably is considerable in the United States and in the world. You should read "The Book of Buried Treasure," by Ralph D. Paine, published by Sturgis & Walton Company of New York, 1911. This will tell you about the most famous buried treasures known of, including that of Cocos Island. What you have been reading lately in Mr. Hearst's Sunday papers is some fact, garbled with a great deal of fiction, and with people, dates, and identities all mixed up. For instance, "The wicked Baron Dampiere" never existed save in the person of Captain William Dampier, an English sea-captain and buccaneer, who sailed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and left the best of all the buccaneer accounts ever printed and extant.

To tell you what the great pirates did would take several books. In my library, among others, I have the following, some of which you should be able to obtain at some public library. They will tell you what you wish to know.

"A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PYRATES from Their First Rise and Settlement in the Island of Providence, to the Present Time. With the Remarkable Actions and Adventures of the two Female Pyrates MARY READ and ANNE BONNE," by Captain Charles Johnson. (Published, London, 1726.) 2 Vols.

"THE HISTORY OF THE BUCANIERS OF AMERICA," by Joseph Esquemeling. (Published, London, 1721.) 2 Vols.

The above contains the adventures of LeGrand, Lolonois, Roche Braziliano, Bat the Portuguese, Pierre Francois, Montbars, Sir Henry Morgan, etc., by Esquemeling.
Of Captains Sharp, Watlin, Sawkins, Coxen and others in the South Sea, by Basil Ringrose.
Of de Graff, Van Horn, etc., by Ravenau de Lussan.
Of the Sieur de Montauban, Captain of Freebooters in Guinea, by Himself.
There is a reprint of the above published in 1853, by Benjamin B. Mussey & Co., 29 Cornhill, Boston.

"HISTORY OF THE BUCCANEERS OF AMERICA," by James Burney, F.R.S. (Published by Swan, Sonnenschein & Co., London, 1891.)
The above is also reprinted by "The Unit Library, Limited," Leicester Square, London, 1902.

"HISTOIRE DES FILIBUSTIERS," by J. W. d'Archenholtz. (Published at Paris, 1804, in French.)

"LIVES AND VOYAGES OF EARLY NAVIGATORS. With a History of the Bucaniers." (Published by J. & J. Harper, New York, 1832.)
(Contains Lives of Sir Francis Drake, Thomas Cavendish and Dampier.)

"LIVES, EXPLOITS AND CRUELTIES OF THE MOST CELEBRATED PIRATES AND SEA ROBBERS." (Published by Milner & Company, Paternoster Row, London. No date.)

"LIVES AND EXPLOITS OF ENGLISH HIGHWAYMEN, PIRATES, AND ROBBERS," by C. Whitehead, Esq. (Published by Bull & Churton, Holles St., London, 1834.) 2 Vols.

"THE PIRATES OWN BOOK OR AUTHENTIC NARRATIVES OF THE LIVES, EXPLOITS, AND EXECUTIONS OF THE MOST CELEBRATED SEA ROBBERS." (Published by Sanborn & Carter, Portland, Me. 1837. Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., Philadelphia, 1837.)

"AN AUTHENTIC ACCOUNT OF THE MOST REMARKABLE EVENTS: Containing the Lives of the Most Noted Pirates and Piracies." (Published by Ezra Strong, New York, 1836.)

"THE LIVES AND BLOODY EXPLOITS OF THE MOST NOTED PIRATES, Their Trials and Executions." (Published by Ezra Strong, Hartford, Conn., 1837.)

"HISTORY AND LIVES OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS PIRATES OF ALL NATIONS." (Published by E. Lloyd, 44 Wych St., Strand, London, 1856.)

"CAPTAIN WILLIAM KIDD AND OTHERS OF THE PIRATES OR BUCCANEERS WHO RAVAGED THE SEAS, THE ISLANDS, AND THE CONTINENTS OF AMERICA TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO," by John S. C. Abbott. (Published by Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1874.)
You will be more apt to find this than any of the others.

"THE BUCCANEERS AND MAROONERS OF AMERICA." Edited by Howard Pyle. (Published by Macmillan & Co., New York, 1891.)

Almost any of the above will tell you all you wish to know. I own others, but you would scarcely be likely to find them in any library.

Pirates sailed all over the globe. Their favorite cruising-ground in this country was about Cuba, Central America, and the Pacific coast of South America.

Piracy flourished the most between 1660-1697, when the Peace of Ryswick put a stop to the buccaneering against the Spanish by the English and French. From the beginning of the next century until 1750 piracy, principally by English, against all nations, their own included, flourished up to 1750. They were captured at all periods. The last pirates captured and executed in this country were the crew of the Cuban schooner *Panda*, hanged at Boston in 1835 for piracy on the brig *Mexican*.

I am very glad, Mr. Kocka, to have been able to answer your questions, but am afraid that in future I will have to ask you to confine yourself to questions on firearms, and specific questions that I can answer short of a book, although I will always be glad to refer you to books.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in stamped International Reply Coupons for answer.

Most Powerful Weapon

ANY argument over this?

Question:—"What is the most effective weapon made in this country or any other?

Is an Iver Johnson .38 caliber a very effective weapon?

What is the most effective and easiest concealed weapon known?"—OTTO FAGOT, New Orleans, La.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—The most powerful weapon I know of at the present time, short of the German anti-tank rifle, is the British .600 cordite rifle, a heavy weapon suited for elephant-hunting, and of very heavy recoil.

If you mean in a hand-gun, the .45 Colt still stands unsurpassed; I do not think the Iver Johnson revolver is any less effective than weapons of a similar caliber, but as far as quality is concerned the Colt and Smith & Wesson revolvers are unequaled, and the money put in one of these revolvers is well invested. Don't get a cheap gun and expect good results, is my experience, which has been rather extensive, I may say:

The easiest concealed weapon is a good knife; the best pocket weapon I know of is the revolver, in .38 caliber, Colt or Smith & Wesson. I favor the .38 hammerless Smith & Wesson on account of there being no hammer to catch in the pocket on drawing the gun, but pack a .41 Colt myself, as I have written before.

Whatever pocket gun you select, get a good one, as a poor weapon that might refuse to work in a pinch might be the cause of losing your life some time.

Again the San Blas

PEOPLE seem never to get tired of asking about this interesting tribe of Central American Indians. And no wonder. Here are a couple of more letters about them, with accompanying answers that restate some facts which have already been printed, together with information which is new to me at any rate:

Question:—"May I ask you for some information on the San Blas country? Have seen it mentioned in the *Adventure* magazine, but can not find it on the map.

Is it true that it is peopled by savage Indians? Where is it located? What languages do the natives speak? Is there any chance to trade profitably with the natives? And is it true that there is placer gold there? Would two good men be able to travel through it and come out in good shape?"—E. C. CLARK, Butte, Mont.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The San Blas country is a strip of country beginning about sixty miles beyond Colon and extending to Hondy Shark Point on the boundary line of Colombia; and extending inland to the top of the Chepo range of mountains.

It is peopled by the San Blas Indians, a self-governing tribe of some 50,000. Although within the republic of Panama they pay little attention to the officials of Panama and run things pretty well to suit themselves. They have a king who has a "council of young men" that have been sent to various parts of the world to be educated.

I once saw their king in Panama City when he came up to look at the Panama Canal. He was a little man, something like a Jap, and was dressed in a poor-fitting suit of American clothes.

Most of these people are smallish in build, with peculiar features and shape of head. If you ever see one San Blas you will know the next one you see, for they are a distinctive type. They speak their own language, and many of them speak Spanish and some few speak English.

There is money in trading along their coast. They have a couple of rules they enforce. The first is for any trader to get back on his boat before dark, and the next is to leave their women alone. They have a saying that no San Blas woman ever married out of their tribe.

They will not allow any one to cross through their country. They police their borders by men in sight of each other with Winchesters. It is impossible to get through without having an army along.

The answer to the subjoined inquiry has been cut down a little, so as to avoid repetition of facts already supplied in the letter to Mr. Clark:

Question:—"The writer is not a greenhorn either in the Pacific or Atlantic, having spent some time in Cuba, Santo Domingo, Haiti, Mexico and Colombia; but like all those who knew the ways of 1914 not sure of the present status regarding foreign territory.

I want to take a 500-ton registered schooner with auxiliary power out of New York stocked with trading goods, and may change my plans and trade along the east coast of South America.

Do you think that this would be a paying investment? If so, what goods would you advise me to take? Where would you advise me to trade, and what are the prospects of carrying a cargo from one port to another? Would it be advisable to sail under the American flag?

Is there any chance of making a prosperous trading-trip up the Amazon? What are the laws regarding trade in the countries you would suggest?

I would thank you for any information you can give me relative to this matter, and await your answer with great interest."—B. T. NASE, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—If I were going to trade along the Atlantic coast of either Central or South America I would head direct for the San Blas Indian coast. There is money in trading with these Indians. I know of at least two men who made enough to retire on after a few years.

They are honest in trade and have both money and trade goods. Overall pants (blue, small sizes) work shirts, cheap straw hats (haystack style with fairly wide brim), machetes, Ingersoll watches, alarm clocks, toy sewing-machines (made by the Singer Co.) also the larger hand-machines made by same company, cheap sheath knives, Russell-Barlow knives, calico of loud colors, mosquito netting, needles and thread, glass beads, axes, kerosene lamps and lanterns, sandals and cheap shoes, are all standard trade goods. There are others I have forgotten.

They have gold dust (in some ports), ivory nuts, rubber, cane brandy, vanilla, sarsaparilla and many other articles that are reckoned as standard goods. You can get current prices on these imports by applying to Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Latin-American Division, Washington, D. C. They will also furnish you with duties into all of the other countries. I don't think you would be troubled about duties in the San Blas country if you could get cleared from here all right, even if it was for those two little islands the U. S. owns in the West Indies.

Strictly speaking, if you entered on this San Blas trade it might be a good plan to fly the Panamanian flag and make Colon a base. You could get almost all you needed for trade right there in the town and order the rest by ship from up here.

It is well to know what the button-makers are paying for ivory nuts. They paid $8 per bbl. before the war here in New York. They should be much higher by now. Also the prices of the other things should be ascertained from the Bureau of Commerce as suggested. This will keep a man hep to what he is trading for.

It is a terribly long trip up the Amazon. Things are very high up there, but it is a long jaunt by boat and the climate is not of the best. You could possibly make more actual money closer home.

Spruce in British Columbia

IN A personal letter to me, Mr. Carson writes regarding the subjoined question and answer: "The man who wants to know about spruce seems to have a hazy idea of this wonderful coast of ours. I did not dare tell him of spruce-trees fifteen and sixteen feet across the stump. That would have been to strain his credulity; but they are here just the same:"

Question:—"Will you please tell me if there is any spruce in British Columbia and on Vancouver Island? If so what kind and how much? Where is it located?"—GERALD FRITZ, Annawan, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—Your questions sound funny. When you ask if there is any spruce in B. C. and Vancouver Island it is along the lines of questioning as to whether there are any colored people in Africa.

Yes, both red and white, billions of feet and located practically all over the province.

I have seen spruce-trees that would measure ten and even twelve feet across the stump, say seven feet from the ground, and which ran up to a height of ninety and a hundred feet without a limb. A spruce-tree three hundred feet high is no novelty. Near Barnet, B. C., on the Burrard Inlet there stood a bunch of seven spruces that had been passed up by the loggers for the reason that they were too big to handle profitably.

If you will write Percy G. Sills, 709 Metropolitan Bldg., Vancouver, B. C., he can give you full particulars as to where the best spruce limits are located in the province, together with quantities and so forth. Mr. Sills was engaged in hunting out the best spruce for airplane construction during the war period and is in a position to furnish you with very reliable data on the subject.

What Stops Fish Biting

SOME say the full moon does; some say it's a cold wind:

Question:—"Can you tell me if the moon has anything to do with fishing? Same say fish feed by moon, and on bright nights the day fishing is no good. Some days the fish bite fine and then again nothing doing. Has the cold or wind anything to do with that?"—G. A. Chabot, Fresno, Cal.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—I think a quick change of weather from warm to cold makes fish less active to bite. I am speaking of the land fish. About the only effect the moon can have is with certain fish as then only do they go much to shoal water and feed. I have noticed them more full of feed in the morning early during light of the moon, and it causes me to draw this conclusion.

I don't know how it is with you; a cold north or east wind blowing is the time I have poorest luck.

Durban's Concentration Camp

AN INCIDENT of the Boer War, recalled as bearing on the old controversy, "Are Americans discriminated against?" (No more than they discriminate against other people, I venture to assert):

Question:—"Before I put my question I would like to relate the incidents leading up to it. I spent quite some time in different parts of South Africa and happened to be in Port Natal during the time the Boer War was going on. Durban and Port Natal were considerably crowded during that time. With more coming every day refugee camps were established on the outskirts of Durban.

Troops were constantly coming and going; and with hundreds of runaway sailors from merchant ships on the beach and overrunning the town, filling the benches in Queen's Park and camping along the water-front, the town took on the appearance of a Western mining town during the gold-rush. I was staying at the Sailors' Home in Port Natal at the time; and, having a little money and lots of spare time, I naturally went around looking over things.

I may mention here that I was discharged from S. S. *Kurachee* when the ship's articles ran out. Most of the crew signed on again at higher wages and stayed with the ship; but a few, including myself, decided to try our luck ashore.

There was no danger of going hungry, at least not as long as the army stores held out, said army stores being piled up along the pier; and our beach-combing sailors lost no time in digging into them. It was a free-and-easy life, and suited the crowd to perfection.

I finally went to work for a contractor, bossing a gang of black boys. Our job was to tear out temporary cattle fittings from cattle-boats and to whitewash the stationary ones before the boats left for another trip.

While I was working at that job I made the acquaintance of a Maltese stevedore, who, by the way, was the best man I ever saw at bossing blacks. I afterward shipped with this Maltese on the *Induna*, a small British coaster going along the east coast into Portuguese territory, and I had lots of opportunity to find out whether the man was all right or not. He impressed me as a man who might be trusted in certain things and who wouldn't lie as long as it was not to his advantage to do so.

Well, when I first met him in Port Natal he wanted to know if I was an American; and when I told him I was he jerked a thumb over his shoulder, and, pointing in the general direction of Durban, wanted to know how I got away. I couldn't make out what he was driving at, and then he told me.

It seems that a lot of American cattle hands and roustabouts of all kinds had drifted over from New Orleans with the different cattle and mule steamers, and, finding the country to their liking, elected to stay there. The town authorities weren't much pleased with this new acquisition, and forthwith started a general round-up of American cattlemen. The result of this round-up were placed in a barbed-wire corral and kept there until a ship could be found to carry them back to the States.

I want to know if this thing has happened to your knowledge, and why were Americans sent out of the country when the beaches were crowded with undesirables of every other nation under the sun? I did not think anything of it at the time, in fact forget all about it until during an argument the question came up—

"Are Americans discriminated against in foreign countries?"—Fred Royal, Pittsburg, Pa.

Answer, by Captain Franklin:—Your letter is very interesting: I happened to be in hospital in Durban at the time you mention, and I remember that there was a concentration camp on the Berea in which deserters from ships were detained pending their deportation to the country from whence they had signed on, or rather to the country under whose flag they had sailed. American citizens were not discriminated against more than men from any other country including Great Britain.

The reason this was done is very apparent. In the first place, large stores of army food were stacked around the docks in Durban. Sailors could easily desert a ship, organize a gang ashore and live off the stores. Even a British sentry has a heart and would never refuse a few cans of bully beef or "Machonochie" rations to a man who was hungry. The cattle-boats therefore about to return to America for more mules would suddenly find they had no crew and would be unable to sail. Drastic measures had to be used.

Durban was under martial law. Every man walking on the streets had to show a pass or be arrested; and if a deserter, was sent to the concentration camp. Your Maltese friend had the right dope in some respects, but I emphatically state that Americans alone were not the only ones picked up and sent to the concentration camps. There were a good number of Americans, it is true, as there were a great number of cattle-boats coming over from New Orleans, etc.

I also know that a great number of American sailors deserted and joined the British forces and made mighty good soldiers. A number of American sailors also deserted and joined the Boers or Col. Blake's Irish Brigade, and they also made mighty good soldiers.

You are right in your description of Durban at this time; a more cosmopolitan crowd of adventurers has seldom gathered. Durban at this time seemed to be the Mecca of all adventurers. I hope I have thrown some light on your interesting letter.

Funnel Marks

KEEP your eye peeled for these the next time you're down on the water-front:

Question:—"Would you be kind enough to send me the funnel marks of the Matson Nav. Co., Pacific Mail S. S. Co., Admiral Line (Pacific S. S. Co.), China Mail S. S. Co. and oblige."—HERBERT DETLEFSEN, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—The funnel mark of the Admiral Line is a buoy, in black, on a salmon-pink band, the buoy being lettered "The Admiral Line P. S. S. Co." Through the buoy extends a pennant with a star on each of the four corners and a St. Andrews cross on a white ground in the center.

Matson line: Blue flag, with seven white stars surrounding white square in center with black letter M in middle.

Pacific Mail S. S. Co: Stack painted buff, with narrow black band at top, with narrow white band just beneath. Has no other insignia except in case of Shipping Board liners operated, which carry red-white-and-blue shield on sides of stack.

China Mail: White circle, with letters C. M., in black interwoven monogram in center.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Cow-Country Customs and Costumes

HERE'S the truth about 'em, let the movie fans howl as they may:

Question:—"Please give me full information concerning the 'wild western' parts of Texas and New Mexico. Please describe in a general way a cow-town in Texas and a mining-town in New Mexico. Describe me the cowboy's dressing and also a cowgirl's dressing-style.

Please name me the style and make of a six-shooter most popular among the bordermen."—PETER SCOZZARI, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—New Mexico is not in the territory assigned to me by *Adventure*. The mining-towns in that State are about the same, I suppose, as they are in other States that carry on the mining industry. Most of the mines in that State, so I have noticed by newspaper accounts, have closed down for a while, owing, I suppose, to the low prices of the metals and the high cost of production.

The cattle-towns of Texas are usually some distance apart. Some are not near a railroad, so the supplies have to be hauled from some railhead. The town usually has two or three stores of general merchandise; before Prohibition went into effect three or four saloons and dance-halls with a burying-ground near the outskirts of the town; blacksmith shop, a few restaurants, a wide-open place in the center of the business districts where the cowboys gather to pitch horseshoes, wrestle, swap yarns, and pass away the time.

In front of the post-office there are usually hitching-railings where the horses are tied—the P. O. is generally in one of the largest stores. Near the outskirts are stock-pens if the town happens to be on a railroad, in which cattle are brought from the range and penned until they can be shipped.

The towns are quiet now since booze has ceased to flow. The once lively towns are the most drowsy now. Tourists passing through cause a great deal of excitement. The arrival of trains is another source of great activity, for you can see the natives running from all directions to the station to see who is coming or who is leaving. The walls of the depot are well braced with the backs of cowboys, who are usually rolling cigarets and watching the pretty girls strolling along the platform.

When a dance is given by one of the inhabitants, people come for miles around, and then there are big times. Cowboys dress usually as farm hands unless they are off in the brushy country, where they wear chaps, high-heel boots, spurs, red bandanna handkerchief, leather cuffs, flannel shirt, leather vest, broad-brim Stetson hat, and perhaps a six-gun. The girls dress pretty much the same way—leather skirts instead of chaps, leather leggings, .45 Colts.

The Traveling Merchant in Mexico

HERE'S a way to see Latin America—all of it—and come home richer than you set out. But of course you have to keep your wits about you:

Question:—"My partner and I are planning on taking a stock of Army goods such as clothing, tents, camp equipment, etc., to south-central Mexico and would like to get a little information regarding:

1. Business conditions at present.
2. Transportation facilities.
3. Customs requirements.

Do you think this class of merchandise would prove popular there?

What in your opinion, is the best locality for a business such as Army equipment?"—L. A. GARDNER, Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—1. Regarding business conditions. You can estimate the buying-power of the usual run of larger towns and cities as ten per cent. of the same-sized cities in the U. S. The same depression in business and work exists in Mexico as in the U. S., and more than half the people in Mexico are about three days ahead of being broke and live from hand to mouth. Of course it will be impossible for you to take arms or ammunition, due to the strict embargo in effect.

2. You have reasonably good railway facilities to almost all the places where you could do a profitable business. From your present location you can cross the border at Laredo, stop over a week in Monterey, a week in Saltillo, a week in San Luis

Potosi, a week in Queretaro, and can take side trips to Leon, Guanajuato, Silao, Irapuato, Guadalajara, etc. As freight service is very slow you will have to ship your goods by express from one place to another.

3. In packing your goods I would suggest that you take only new goods as the customs will charge you as much for second-hand goods as new goods, and the duty is very high, especially on wool shirts, shoes, etc. It will be necessary for you to pack your goods in cases similar to trunks, carefully weighing the net weight of each class or kind of goods and making out several packing-lists, one or two for yourselves and for the customs broker, who will cross your shipment for you, attending to all customs requirements. Do not fail to make out packing-lists, for if you do not the customs broker will have to weigh all the stuff and will charge you accordingly.

Number each case and make them up so you can use them for counters and shelves, as you must rent a vacant store in each place you go. Have big cloth signs painted in Spanish advertising your goods, and have some handbills printed with blank for address so you can have them distributed in each town. It will be necessary for you to go with some one who speaks the language, for if not you sure will have one fine fix for yourselves.

I believe the following would go well: Quilts, blankets, shoes, some O D wool and cotton shirts, socks, underwear, raincoats, a few folding cots, breeches, and so forth. Camp equipment would not have much of a demand, but would recommend a mixed stock of articles generally used. I would suggest buying job lots of knickknacks such as buttons, thread, needles, pins, cheap laces and embroideries, handkerchiefs, and five-and-ten-cent store goods.

If you will go to some jobber or wholesaler in El Paso they will be able to tell you about what will sell as they have many customers who make a business of traveling back and forth, stopping in one place and another and coming back to the border for more. Do not let them stock you up too heavy, and always try to keep a sufficient amount of money on hand so as not to have to sell any of your stock at a loss to raise funds.

You will have to pay so much a day in each town you go to sell goods there, and will have to fix it up with the Renta del Timbre or Internal Revenue as there is a tax of two per cent. on all retail sales. You can fix this up in each place, for if you do not, naturally the local merchants will lay a trap for you and get you fined. I would suggest that you have some signs made and hire a small band to carry the signs around the streets.

I hardly feel able to advise you definitely as to the success or not of your plan as it all depends on yourself, and how you are able to sell goods with the Mexicans. Never put the first price you ask on the goods as your selling price as they all like to haggle you down and it tickles them to think they got it for five cents less. The fixed price is the exception and not the rule in Mexico.

I would suggest traveling about and staying a week or so in each place, according as to how business goes. You will find competition brisk and that the local merchants are no slouches in doing business.

You will need a passport,* secured through the U. S. District Court or State Court for Naturalization, costing you ten dollars and the visé of the Mexican Consul at the line, another ten dollars. It will take you about three weeks to get a passport, and *much* red tape. Send twenty-five cents to the Pan-American Union, Washington, for their Map of Mexico and one dollar for their book on Mexico. Write to the Department of Commerce for the "Supplement to Consular Reports" covering Mexico, and ask them what they think of the idea also.

Do not take too much stuff with you, and leave cases of goods packed ready for shipment at the border, numbered; and keep lists of the contents so in case you run short you can order them by wire from your customs worker as the duties and expense will surprize you.

I hope this data will prove of value to you, and in case I have not made any point clear would be glad to hear from you again.

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*Passports regulations possibly changed or abolished by the time this issue goes on sale.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

LONERGAN, SGT. PATRICK, MEEHAN, JACK. Or any of the boys of Co. C., 29th Infantry. Sgt. Patrick Lonergan and Jack Meehan last heard of in Buffalo and Panama City. Write your old-time friend of Fort Porter days.—Address J. E. Downs, 2572 Main St., Buffalo, N. Y.

WASHBURN, HUGH E. (May go by name of Hall, his mother's maiden name.) Born near Black River Falls, Wis. Age twenty-six or twenty-seven. Last heard of cutting props in Sullivan, Mo., February or March, 1916. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address JACK WASHBURN, 417 E. Okmulgee, Muskogee, Okla.

McNALLY, PATRICK and JOE. Brothers. Natives of Belfast, Ireland. Father was a sailor. They were last seen 1892 when visiting Newark with an Arab troupe of acrobats. Patrick is now forty or fifty and Joe is forty-six. Any information will be appreciated.—Address KATE McNALLY, care of Mrs. Dunn, 496 East 189th St., New York City.

LEIDER, DOLORES of Denver, Colorado, please write to me.—Address MARGARET SULLIVAN, Box 116, International Falls, Minn.

CLARKE, GILBERT VAN ANTWERPT. Last heard from in 1912, working for Montreal Light, Heat and Power Co., in Montreal, P. Q. Height about five feet eleven inches, weight about 170 pounds. Married Miss Fannie Clark of Moncton, N. B., in Boston, 1906. Write your old buddy on the *Barbadian* and *Cambrian*.—Address Box 244, Tunica, Miss.

PECK, LOUIS M. Last seen at Wilbur Wright Field, Fairfield, Ohio. Discharged from the U. S. Air Service there about July 20th, 1921. Height five feet eleven inches, weight about 200 pounds. Enthusiastic adventurer. May be in Louisville, Kentucky, or Aurantia, Florida. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ERWIN C. ROSENAU, 130 Washington Street, Naperville, Ill.

KEPNER, MRS. EDITH. Last heard from in 1920, at El Centron, Imperial Valley. Any information will be appreciated.—Address RAVENA HARRINGTON, 2271 Junipero Place, Long Beach, Cal.

MANNION, MICHAEL PATRICK. Last heard from three years ago. Was then in Syracuse, N. Y., living with his sister. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address JOHN F. SHEEHAN, Rt. 9, Box 777, Dallas, Texas.

ANY ex-soldiers who knew or served under Sgt. Edwin Swain, 354 Bakery Co., St. Aignan, A. E. F. France, please write to LEO C. KOMBACHER, Morrisville, New York.

KING, PHILLIPS. Last seen in Glencoe, Minn. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address ALF. HEIBERG, 3 West 26th St., Minneapolis, Minn.

BROWN, EDDIE ALFORD. Age twenty-five. Blond hair. Last seen at Camp Lewis, Washington. Sister very anxious to hear from him.—Address MRS. F. F. HELLAR, Juneau, Alaska.

BROWN, MISS JOSEPHINE. Last heard of in Garvin, Oklahoma, living with family by name of Bishop. Since then left Garvin. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JOHNNIE RILEY BROWN, 744 East 49th St., Chicago, Ill.

THE following have been inquired for in either the January 30th or February 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of inquirers from this magazine:

AGNEW, THOS.; Armstrong, Scott H.; Barrow, Edward C.; Farwell, Frank J. or Mack; Fraser, James Ogilvie; Hazelton, V. J.; Hays or Hayer, Conrad; Herbert, N. A.; Jury, W. E.; Kubid, Charles; Kuss, Corp. George A.; Le Effe, Jack; McNamara, William or William Thomas; McWilliams, Walter; Nelson, G. W.; Richter, George Alfred; Sharman, George; Specter or Speck, Mary and Louise; Wilmington, Rev. A. W.

MISCELLANEOUS—Frank; Shipmates on U. S. S. *Balch* in 1918 who knew Elza Newman; Shipmates on U. S. S. *Lakeside;* Capt. Mooney, Lt. Hoffman, Ensigns Osburn, Green and Rarrabee, Tynn, G. M.; Blais, Douglas; Patten, S. S.; Osborne, C. E.; Card, Sam; O'Reilly, E. M.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FEBRUARY 28TH ISSUE

Besides the complete novel and the complete novelette mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE "DOUBLE THIRTEEN" — ***Norman J. Bonney***
Smugglers' tricks on a Japanese liner.

THE MUTINY — ***A. Judson Hanna***
Queer sport on an ocean tramp.

THE WHITE DAWN A Four-Part Story Part III — ***Hugh Pendexter***
Burgoyne invades New York.

THE GREEN DEVIL — ***F. St. Mars***
A tyrant of the tree-tops.

CELESTIAL CARGO An Off-the-Trail Story — ***Gregory Mason***
"Chinamen's courage" takes on a new meaning.

SAME OLD VIC — ***Romaine H. Lowdermilk***
"Read 'em and weep!"

THE ROLLING STONE — ***Edgar Young***
A philosopher with the *Wanderlust*.

TWICE FOR THE SAME OFFENSE — ***G. A. Wells***
The sheriff uses the right rope.

Play
Without
Notes

Be a Master of JAZZ and RAGTIME

Anybody Who Can Remember a Tune Can Learn to Play Jazz, Ragtime and Popular Songs by Ear, Easily, Quickly, at Very Small Cost. New Method Makes Piano Playing Wonderfully Simple.

No matter how little you know about music—**even if you "have never touched a piano"**—if you can just remember a tune, **you can learn to play by ear.** I have perfected an entirely new system. It is so simple, so easy and shows you so many little tricks of playing that it just comes natural to pick out on the piano any piece that is running through your mind. Even dull pupils grasp the idea readily and follow through the entire course of 20 lessons quickly.

Play By Ear in 90 Days

No need to devote years to study in order to learn piano nowadays. I teach you to play by ear in a small fraction of the usual time and at a smaller fraction of the cost. No tiresome scales or arpeggios to learn—no do-re-mi, no nerve-racking practice of monotonous, meaningless exercises. **You learn to play what you want to play right off.** No special talent is necessary. Every lesson is so easy, so interesting and fascinating that you "can't keep your hands off the piano." Just devote a part of your spare time to it and you will be playing and entertaining your friends almost before you realize how this wonderful new accomplishment has been acquired.

Experienced and talented musicians are amazed at the rapid progress of my pupils and say they cannot understand why this method was not thought of years ago. Yet it has never been used before; is not used by any other teacher or school today.

Be the Popular One In Your Crowd

One who can sit down any time without notes or music, reel off the latest jazz, ragtime and song hits and **entertain** the crowd is **always** the **popular** one in the crowd, the center of attraction, the life of every party, sought and invited everywhere.

The
NIAGARA
METHOD

Why not be the popular one in **your** crowd? You can learn to play as easily as hundreds of others I have taught; and you can profit by it—not only through the pleasure it provides, but also by playing at entertainments, dances, movies, etc.

Now is the time to Begin. Just spend a little of your spare time with my easy, fascinating lessons and just see how quickly you "catch on" and learn to play. **You'll be amazed, whether you are a beginner or an advanced student.** Write for my book, "The Niagara Method," describing this wonderful new method of playing by ear. I send it free.

Ronald G. Wright, Director,
Niagara School of Music, Dept. 420
Niagara Falls, N. Y.

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NIAGARA SCHOOL OF MUSIC, Dept. 420, Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Please send me your Free Booklet describing "The Niagara Method." Name..
Age....... Ever taken piano lessons?...... Street..
For how long a time? .... City ....

How I Improved My Memory In One Evening

The Amazing Experience of Victor Jones

"OF COURSE I place you! Mr. Addison Sims, of Seattle.

"If I remember correctly—and I **do** remember correctly—Mr. Burroughs, the lumberman, introduced me to you at the luncheon of the Seattle Rotary Club three years ago in May. This is a pleasure indeed! I haven't laid eyes on you since that day. How is the grain business? And how did that amalgamation work out?"

The assurance of the speaker—in the crowded corridor of the Hotel McAlpin—compelled me to turn and look at him, though I must say it is not my usual habit to "listen in" even in a hotel lobby.

"He is David M. Roth, the famous memory expert," said my friend Kennedy, answering my question before I could get it out. "He will show you a lot more wonderful things than that, before the evening is over."

And he did.

As we went into the banquet room the toastmaster was introducing a long line of guests to Mr. Roth. I got in line and when it came my turn, Mr. Roth asked, "What are your initials, Mr. Jones, and your business connection and telephone number?" Why he asked this I learned later, when he picked out from the crowd of 60 men he had met two hours before and called each by name without a mistake. What is more, he named each man's business and telephone number, for good measure.

I won't tell you all the other amazing things this man did except to tell how he called back, without a minute's hesitation, long lists of numbers, bank clearings, prices, lot numbers, parcel-post rates and anything else the guests had given him in rapid order.

* * * * *

When I met Mr. Roth again—which you may be sure I did the first chance I got—he rather bowled me over by saying, in his quiet modest way:

"There is nothing miraculous about my remembering anything I want to remember, whether it be names, faces, figures, facts or something I have read in a magazine."

"That is all right for you, Mr. Roth," I interrupted. "You have given years to it. But how about me?"

"Mr. Jones," he replied, "I can teach you the secret of a good memory in one evening. This is not a guess, because I have done it with thousands of pupils. In the first of seven simple lessons which I have prepared for home study, I show you the basic principle of my whole system and you will find it—not hard work as you might fear—but just like playing a fascinating game. I will prove it to you."

He didn't have to prove it. His course did; I got it the very next day from his publishers, the Independent Corporation.

When I tackled the first lesson, I suppose I was the most surprised man in forty-eight states to find that I had learned—in about one hour—how to remember a list of one hundred words so that I could call them off forward and back without a single mistake.

That first lesson **stuck.** And so did the other six.

Read this letter from Terence J. McManus, of the firm of Olcott, Bonynge, McManus & Ernst, Attorneys and Counsellors at Law, 170 Broadway, and one of the most famous trial lawyers in New York:

"May I take occasion to state that I regard your service in giving this system to the world as a public benefaction. The wonderful simplicity of the method, and the ease with which its principles may be acquired, especially appeal to me. I may add that I already had occasion to test the effectiveness of the first two lessons in the preparation for trial of an important action in which I am about to engage."

Mr. McManus didn't put it a bit too strong. The Roth Course is priceless! I can absolutely **count** on my memory now.

I used to be "scared stiff" on my feet because I wasn't **sure.** I couldn't remember what I wanted to say.

Now I am sure of myself, and confident and "easy as an old shoe" when I get on my feet at the club, or at a banquet, or in a business meeting, or in any social gathering.

Perhaps the most enjoyable part of it all is that I have become a good conversationalist—and I used to be as silent as a sphinx when I got into a crowd of people who knew things.

Now I can call up like a flash of lightning most any fact I want right at the instant I need it most. I used to think a "hair trigger" memory belonged only to the prodigy and genius. Now I see that every man of us has that kind of a memory if he only knows how to make it work right.

I tell you it is a wonderful thing, after groping around in the dark for so many years to be able to switch the big searchlight on your mind and see instantly everything you want to remember.

Have you ever heard of "Multigraph" Smith? Real name H. Q. Smith, of John E. Price & Co., Seattle, Wash. Here is just a bit from a letter of his that I saw last week:

"Here is the whole thing in a nutshell: Mr. Roth has a most remarkable Memory Course. It is simple, and easy as falling off a log. Yet with one hour a day of practice anyone—I don't care who he is—can improve his Memory 100% in a week and 1,000% in six months."

My advice to you is, don't wait another minute. Send to Independent Corporation for Mr. Roth's amazing course and see what a wonderful memory you have got. Your dividends in **increased earning power** will be enormous.

Victor Jones.

400,000

people have paid $5 or $7 for one of our Self-Improvement Courses—and remember no one was asked to pay until he had five days to examine the course in his own home.

Until the Independent Corporation published the "Roth Memory Course," "Mastery of Speech," "Drawing, Art and Cartooning," "Reading Character at Sight," "How to Write Stories," and other personal development courses, where could anyone buy similar courses for less than $15 to $75?

Because we want to add two hundred thousand more names to our list of satisfied customers at an early date, we are making a

SPECIAL PRICE $3

(REGULAR PRICE $5—

Others sell for $15 to $75)

Act quickly as this special opportunity may be open for only a short time. Many purchasers have written letters similar to Robert P. Downs of Detroit, Mich.:

"I can't see how you ask so little, while others with far inferior courses get from $20 to $60 for theirs."

Send No Money

So confident is the Independent Corporation, the Publishers of the Roth Memory Course, that you will find the Course indispensable that they are willing to send it on free examination.

Don't send any money. Merely mail the coupon or write a letter and the complete course will be sent, all charges prepaid, at once, so that you may take advantage of the special price and save $2. If you are not entirely satisfied, send it back any time within five days after you receive it and you will owe nothing.

On the other hand, if you are as pleased as are the thousands of other men and women who have used the Course, send only $3 in full payment. You take no risk and you have everything to gain, so mail the coupon now before this remarkable offer is withdrawn. **Independent Corporation, Dept. R-472, 319 Sixth Avenue, New York.**

FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

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Independent Corporation

Dept. R-472 **319 Sixth Avenue, New York**

You may send me the Course or Courses checked below. Within five days after receipt I will either remail the Course (or Courses) or send you $3.00 for each in full payment.

☐ Roth Memory Course By David M. Roth	☐ Mastery of Speech By Frederick Houk Law
☐ Money-Making Account System By Wesley W. Ferrin	☐ How to Write Stories By Prof. Walter B. Pitkin
☐ How to Read Character at Sight By Dr. K. M. H. Blackford	☐ Drawing, Art and Cartooning Course By Charles Lederer

Name ....

Address ....

Adventure 2-20-22